

EXPERIENCES AND LEADERSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN CEOs AT FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

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This study focused on five African American Fortune 500 CEOs and their leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, their recommendations to emerging leaders, ways in which they define diversity, how they leveraged diversity in their organizations and how if any the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity within their organizations. The researcher identified only 16 African American current and former Fortune 500 CEOs in the history of the Fortune 500. Participants were interviewed either in person or via telephone with the exception of one who opted to submit questionnaire answers electronically.

Participants completed a demographic data worksheet along with 10 interview questions. Two findings emerged as a result of this study: 1) All participants (100%) in this study agreed that a Fortune 500 CEOs leadership trajectory should encompass: leadership experience, educational degrees and institutions attended, mentorship and perseverance; 2) All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to

incorporating it and; 2a) The majority of the participants (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect.

This study included recommendations by the participants to aspiring CEOs and other minorities and researcher recommendations to Human Resource Professionals and White Executives. A recommendation by the researcher suggests that a study should be conducted on African American female corporate CEOs and their bouts with leading predominantly white organizations (i.e., critical incidents). The results of the demographic data correlations produced an outline of what characteristics makeup an African American Fortune 500 CEO, see Chapter 4.

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Chapter I

THE PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter presents background data for this study on African American Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)—more specifically on how they describe their leadership trajectory, leverage and define diversity in their organizations, discuss the significance of mentorship, explain their meaning of community (Black community), and offer insight into organizational climate during the current heightened racial-social era in America (i.e., Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Yvette Smith, Rekia Boyd, Sandra Bland, Aiyana Jones, South Carolina church shootings, Black Lives Matter, etc). This chapter provides definitions important to understand for this study, identifies the responsibilities of a CEO, and provides a brief historical analysis of African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies. Additionally, this chapter briefly discusses the research problem, research purpose, research design, research rationale, and significance of the study. Before delving into the literature, it is essential to understand what a Fortune 500 company is and why it is considered to be of such prestige.

The Fortune 500

Fortune 500 refers to *Fortune Magazine*'s annual list of the top 500 public companies in the United States ranked by sales, assets, earnings, and capitalization (referenceforbusiness.com, 2015). This list began in 1955 and only ranks public companies with issued securities through an offering, which are traded on the stock market.

According to USlegal.com (2015), academic and business researchers generally look to Fortune 500 companies to learn about best practices in various industries as guidance for discovering business secrets and financial success. The total value of the companies on the list serves as a predictor for whether the economy is growing or decreasing by an examination of the companies listed (EHow, 2015). Economists typically rely on the list to make predictions of future trends and popular industries. Each Fortune 500 company is led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The CEO

A CEO is the top executive responsible for an organization's operations and performance. He or she serves as the link between the board of directors and the organization's various integral operations (business dictionary, 2015). A typical day for a CEO involves developing business strategies, hiring and promoting staff, overseeing financial budgets, and meeting with investors and department heads (McSween, 2015). CEOs bear full responsibility for a company's successes and failures and are often unable to control the outcomes (Porter, Lorsch, & Nohria, 2004). With every Fortune 500 company, the CEO serves as the leading force of the organization and has "more

authority than anyone else in the organization, but unable to wield it without unhappy consequences” (Porter et al., 2004, para. 1). Understanding the historical context of the Fortune 500 CEO establishes the implications for this research study.

Implications for Research

Forty-four years after the Fortune 500 list was established, history was made in 1999 when Franklin D. Raines became the first African American CEO of Fannie Mae, a Fortune 500 company and the largest non-bank financial services company in the world (Bacchus, 2004; Schlesinger, 1999). Fifteen other African Americans have held this title since.¹ With the election of the first biracial president of the United States, one would assume an increase of African American executives (CEOs in particular) at Fortune 500 companies. This assumption could not be further from the truth. Despite degrees and years of experience, the numbers indicate a continuing disparity. According to Junius (2012), since Barack Obama’s election, 51% of Americans now express explicit anti-Black attitudes, compared with 48% in a similar 2008 survey conducted by the Associated Press. Unfortunately, this appears to have translated into the corporate world. This research outlines the multiple variables that have contributed to this statistic with education, racial stereotypes, shifts in diversity slogans, and lack of mentors at the center of the discussion.

The questions remain: How does the CEO prepare a successor plan and mentor fellow aspiring CEOs of Fortune 500 companies when he or she may not have had

¹ Dr. Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. became the Chairman and CEO of TIAA-CREF in 1987, a Fortune 500 service company, which made the regular Fortune 500 list in 1995, after his tenure (blackentrepreneur profile, 2015). Wharton is noted as the first African American CEO to lead a Fortune 500.

mentors themselves? Is there an elephant in the room suggesting that mentors need to resemble one's racial demographics? Is it an assertion that the CEOs' previous Caucasian counterparts have not effectively mentored them? How has the consistent racial unrest in the country (Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Yvette Smith, Rekia Boyd, Sandra Bland, Aiyana Jones, South Carolina church shootings, the emergence of Black Lives Matter, etc.) changed the dynamic of the corporate climate? Is there a consistent pressure for African American CEOs to give back to their "communities" and be leaders of change? What exactly does "giving back" mean? Does it entail volunteering at a Boys and Girls Club in an impoverished community, serving at a food bank monthly, or going to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and offering mentorship opportunities and hiring pipelines for African American students?

Some may argue that these responsibilities entail changing the entire landscape of human resource (HR) hiring practices (Harper, 2013). It may be all of the above or, in fact, none of the above, depending on which CEO one converses with. A search utilizing key words in ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the Gottesman Libraries at Teachers College, Columbia University revealed no other research studies addressing these questions partially because of the lack of access to the 500 CEOs and the fact that the numbers have only recently increased to 16 over the past 16 years. For this study, I had access to several Fortune 500 CEOs (by way of professional affiliation) and have been able to provide the necessary data "from the horse's mouth," so to speak. This allows for a first-hand narrative into the lives, everyday interactions, and decision-making processes of these CEOs. Perhaps, their insight can address the lack of African American Fortune

500 CEOs. Researchers have argued that there is no excuse for why African Americans cannot achieve the CEO role and place the blame on economic inequality, lack of diversity in employment, resentment toward affirmative action programs, and the absence of Black leaders (Walters & Smith, 1999).

While Black males have been mentored for years in Black American communities by ministers, teachers, fraternities, and other service groups, there is still little or no mentoring for Blacks in the corporate top echelon (Cobbs & Turnock, 2003; Thomas, 2001). Fernandez (1987) noted that the vast majority of those who get ahead in corporate America are strongly dependent on mentoring relationships. Unfortunately, much of his work in this area has shown “that the more you are like the corporate leaders, both physically and mentally, the greater your chances are for advancement” (p. 79). Thomas (2001) also argued that individuals who are coached/mentored toward the necessary jobs and assignments are the ones who end up as top executives in corporate America.

Problem Statement

The highest office in the United States was recently occupied by a biracial African American male. This fact indicates to many that the world has changed in terms of racial dynamics (i.e., representational power, post-racial society); however, the number of African American executives occupying pinnacle positions at Fortune 500 companies lack in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. This is particularly evident in the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). As of April 1, 2018, only 16 African American executives (one female and 15 males) have obtained the Chairman or CEO position at a Fortune 500 listed company since its existence in 1955 (see Appendix E for

names and companies). Of these 16 executives, four are currently active CEOs at a Fortune 500 (Black Enterprise Profile, 2014). A study by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) found that of all senior male managers at Fortune 1000 and Fortune 500 service industries, 97% of the executives were White males, while only 0.6% were African American males (Bacchus, 2004). Considering that the African American population at the time was approximately 13%, the number of CEO's was relatively low. According to Arnold Donald, CEO of the Executive Leadership Council, there are fewer than 800 Black executives in the top echelons of Fortune 500 firms (Isidore, 2012). Donald further stated that those companies averaged 70 executives at that level, of which 2% were African Americans. According to an article in *The Huffington Post*, Berman (2015) stated that Black CEOs at Fortune 500 companies equal a mere 0.8%. This percentage is alarming to aspiring African American Fortune 500 CEOs, considering that the African American U.S. population has increased to 13.1% for those identifying as only African American and 14.2% for those who affiliate with another race in addition to their African American ancestry, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2012 demographics data study (cdc.gov, 2015). A contributing factor to this shortfall could be that Blacks (males in particular) have been bombarded with negative stereotypes and depictions of self (Jones, 1994) and lack of opportunity due to racism. In his study, Bacchus (2004) interviewed 200 participants and found that one of the top inhibitors of becoming a corporate executive in America was racial stereotyping (which 46% of the participants experienced) and the notion of White males looking to maintain the status quo, to which 68% of the participants agreed. Other factors included lack of advanced education, homicide rates, and general health disparities (Bacchus,

2004; Jones, 1994). Despite the various inhibitors, there are those who overcome the complexities and occupy the C-Suite. In an effort to understand their accomplishment, I considered it crucial to discuss a CEO's leadership trajectory.

An abundance of research has centered on the nuances of executive leadership; however, research that includes the leadership trajectory and recommendations of African American Fortune 500 CEOs (thereby providing a guide for emerging African American Fortune 500 CEOs) is absent in the research. Additionally, the ways in which these current and former executives leverage and define diversity within their organizations, consider the significance of mentorship, explain their meaning of community (Black community), and offer insight into the organizational climate during the current heightened racial-social era in America is virtually non-existent in the literature (i.e., Hayes, 2008; Mycroft, 2012; Northouse, 2016; Pinkett, Robinson, & Patterson, 2011). Relatable studies have relied on archival data and selected interviews from CEOs and/or executives from non-Fortune 500 companies. With the rapid changes (i.e., social media, 24-hour news cycle, technological advances, international relations and corporate downsizing) of the economy and corporate structure, it is imperative to hear the silent voices of the current and former African American Fortune 500 CEOs.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences and leadership recommendations of current and former African American CEOs of Fortune 500 companies in an effort to benefit aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, HR professionals, and White executives who work with and aim to incorporate more African

American executives. This study presents qualitative data on the disparities of African American CEOs, examines the meaning of diversity within their organizations, discusses the significance of mentorship, explains their meaning of community (Black community), and offers insight into organizational climate during the current heightened racial-social era in America. These examinations may provide a potential blueprint for aspiring African Americans to obtain top-tier positions (e.g., passageway, successor plan). This “passageway” is arguably inadequate and should derive only from current and former African American CEOs of a Fortune 500 company. The participants in this study provided first-hands narrative of their career trajectory and spoke from a place of lived experience as a Fortune 500 CEO. This study is of great importance as a search using key words in ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the Gottesman Libraries at Teachers College, Columbia University revealed no other research projects addressing this specific focus.

Research Questions

1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
2. How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
 - 2a. In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

Research Design Overview

This study was based on a non-experimental qualitative narrative analysis. The information obtained was based on participants’ responses to a demographic

questionnaire and a narrative biography accompanied by question prompts. The participants responded to a demographic questionnaire and their narratives were derived from their one-on-one interviews. The information from the demographic questionnaire and narrative biography was then compared to the literature for a thorough analysis (e.g., leadership definitions, racism, community, mentorship, diversity) and discussion.

Researcher Perspectives

As a semi-resigned Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a nonprofit organization, I have consistently been enamored with the leadership attributes of CEOs. My previous research focused on the leadership styles and board recommendation effectiveness of African American Chancellors at California community colleges, 11 out of a total of 19. Much insight was gained from this study, leading to the development of several conference presentations (at The Association of Pan African Doctoral Scholars, Teachers College, Columbia University Diversity and Research Practice, and The University of the West Indies School of Education). The need to explore a more in-depth analysis of African American leadership led me to African American CEOs, particularly at Fortune 500 companies, due to the prestige and limited number of individuals who have occupied these positions and continue to do so.

Assumptions of the Study

In an era of WikiLeaks and Sony hacks, I assumed that the participants would be guarded for the initial part of the interview due to their lack of trust of the world “outside” of the organization. I spent time explaining the significance of the data collection and stressing confidentiality. My assumption was that it might be difficult for

the participants to discuss sensitive topics such as race and their definitions of (the Black) community. Furthermore, I assumed that the CEOs would stick to their scheduled interview times and be truthful with all responses. Finally, I assumed that the participants would be most concerned with the time allotted for the interview and more than likely rush the process because of their imperative responsibilities. I assured them that all questions and interview materials were ready for immediate use avoid wasting time.

Rationale and Significance

The research questions were answered based on the individual experiences provided by the participants via narrative analysis. Due to the small population size, the study was purely qualitative (i.e., demographic data, in-person interview narratives). The main focus of this study was to gain knowledge of African American CEOs and how they describe their journey to the C-Suite. This study offered insight into the lives and works and thinking of aspiring African American CEOs and provided a source for HR professionals to facilitate programs that promote future African American CEOs. I view this study as a self-help guide for aspiring minority leaders as well as a tutorial to help navigate one through the complexities of leadership and the surrounding environment, despite lack of mentors, racism, the racial-social era, and other impediments to progress.

In summary, to dissect the complexities of such an important subject as African American CEOs, one must understand that there are many leadership models and analysis that rely primarily on western White male philosophies (Harper, 2013; Walters & Smith, 1999). The leadership models and theories rarely touch on the challenges of leading if one is Black in a predominately White organization. This study addresses how one leads

in the face of oppression, stereotype, and lack of opportunity (mentors). Suffice it to say, African Americans have reached the C-Suite and performed effectively. This study will hopefully point out the necessary steps to replicate this trajectory while also confronting sensitive issues such as diversity and the current racial-social era.

Definition of Terms

African American² - A citizen of the United States whose ancestors were mostly indigenous to Sub-Saharan Africa. Most African Americans are the descendants of captive Africans who were enslaved within the boundaries of the present United States, although some are—or are descended from—voluntary immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and South America (African-Americans, n.d.; Harper, 2013).

C-Suite - A term used to describe corporate officers and directors. The term derives from the letter C in most high-level positions (i.e., CEO, COO, CFO, etc.) (Business dictionary, 2015).

Diversity - “The condition of being different; the state of being diverse; dissimilitude; variety; and a diversity of interests” (Maltbia & Power, 2009, p. 39; Webster, 1988, p. 369; 1997, p. 145). Diversity is also defined as how an organization responds to diversity based on a process or set of actions (Maltbia & Power, 2009).

Experiential Learning - Learning that occurs outside an educational setting or as part of non-assessed programs (*International Encyclopedia of Adult Education*, 2005).

² When referring to race, the terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Leadership – As defined by Yukl (2006), leadership is considered here in terms of “traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position. Yukl described in *Leadership in Organizations* that the survival of an organization depends on its organizational effectiveness. Survival measures include: (a) efficiency and process reliability, (b) human relations and resources, and (c) innovation and adaptation to the environment” (Harper, 2013, p. 5).

Fortune 500 - *Fortune Magazine*’s annual list of the top 500 public companies in the United States ranked by sales, assets, earnings, and capitalization (reference for business.com, 2015).

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) - The top executive responsible for an organization’s operations and performance. He or she serves as the link between the board of directors and the organization’s various integral operations (business dictionary, 2015).

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter I discussed the significance of a Fortune 500 company and the limited number of African American CEOs in its 60-year existence; Franklin D. Raines became the first African American Fortune 500 CEO in 1999 (Bacchus, 2004; Schlesinger, 1999). It also noted the importance of an African American CEO passageway for aspiring Black CEOs, specifically how they leverage and define diversity in their organizations, describe their leadership trajectory, discuss the significance of mentorship, explain their meaning of community (Black community), and offer insight into organizational climate during the current heightened racial-social era in America.

Chapter II now establishes an in-depth review of the literature on leadership, community, racism, notoriety, mentorship, diversity, and experiential learning. These topics offer theorists' input, celebrity racial encounters, and the real-life experiences of those who have acquired leadership roles (primarily CEOs). Popular culture vis-à-vis race relations also plays a significant role in the literature review. The literature incorporates classical theorist perspectives in an effort to merge current predicaments and shortfalls in society with the upper echelons of leadership roles. Leadership has been studied for centuries, yet there has been no distinct definition of who embodies the meaning of a "true leader." There has been much discussion of what attributes an effective leader should have—traits, skills, situational adeptness, contingent or transformational

(Northouse, 2016). This literature review begins by providing some key theorists' perceptions of what they consider to be an effective leader.

Defining Leadership

“Wherever I sit will be the head of the table” (Cervantes, 2003, p. 699). Cohen and Brawer (2008) agreed that this statement has symbolized the meaning of leadership over the past 4,000 years. Leadership is a subject that has been in existence since the inception of civilization and can adopt different meanings from one scholar to the next. According to Yukl (2006), leadership can be defined in terms of traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position.

Kotter (1990) suggested that organizational change occurs when leadership seeks to produce it by “(a) developing a vision of the future and strategies for making necessary changes, (b) communicating and explaining the vision, and (c) motivating and inspiring people to attain the vision” (Harper, 2013, p. 8). There is no significant distinction when comparing leaders versus non-leaders or efficient versus non-efficient leaders (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Leadership is based on the individual definitions of those who have attempted to define the term (Northouse, 2016; Stogdill, 1974).

The majority of leadership definitions are based on the premise that one person is able to exert authoritative power over subordinates as a means of guiding, structuring, and facilitating relations in organizations (Yukl, 2006). Nevertheless, according to many behavioral scientists and practitioners, the effectiveness of an organization is contingent on its leadership (Yukl, 2006). “In the strictly vertical organization of the past, the leader

was seen as a solitary figure at the top of the pyramid whereby information went up and orders came down” (Harper, 2013, p.10; Marx, 2006). Marx (2006) explained that today, the vertical leadership system is transforming into one that is more horizontal. “As knowledge continues to grow, the leader is unable to fabricate knowing it all” (Harper, 2013, p. 10). Essentially, leaders survive in organizations by establishing buy-in with team players who envision large and small pictures of the leaders’ ideals (Marx, 2006). Bass (1990) suggested that leadership is viewed as the focus of group process. This perspective places the leader at the center of group change and activity, for which he or she then embodies the will of the group.

“Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished” (Richards & Engle, 1986, p. 206). A plethora of leadership theories have proposed varying taxonomies of decisional procedures; however, there has not been agreement on the optimal number of decision procedures or the best way to define them (Heller & Yukl, 1969; Strauss, 1977; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958), distinguished three varieties of consultation: (1) the leader presents a decision made without prior consultation, but is willing to modify it in the face of strong objections and concerns; (2) the leader presents a tentative proposal and actively encourages people to suggest ways to improve it; and (3) the leader presents a problem and asks others to participate in diagnosing it and developing solutions, but then makes the decision alone. (Harper, 2013, p. 13)

The theories of leadership can be invoked on whomever chooses to incorporate them as a strategy or encompass them based on distinct characteristics. The most popular leadership theories include traits, skills, style, situational, path-goal theory, leader-member exchange theory, transformational, authentic, contingency, psychodynamic, and team leadership,

among others. The focus of this study did not rely on leadership theories per se, but if the participants mentioned specific theories, the topics were addressed in the results section of this research. A description of these various types of leadership theories along with their strengths and critiques can be found in Appendix F. In this light, Bennis's (1959) statement is particularly relevant to this study:

Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it . . . and still the concept is not sufficiently defined. (p. 259)

Bennis was accurate in his analysis concerning the varying definitions of leadership because the term continues to be restructured by emerging researchers. Northouse (2016) suggested that leadership can be attributed to a position (assigned leadership) or by the ways in which group members respond to an individual (emergent leadership). Assigned leadership is based on the occupancy of a position in an organization such as CEO, department heads, and team leaders. An emergent leader is typically one who stands on the sidelines, yet is quite influential regardless of the title. In the Fortune 500 arena, the CEO is considered to be an individual of many complexities and may in fact embody the various definitions of leadership as other CEOs of non-Fortune 500 companies. An analysis of the former and current CEOs of Fortune 500 companies will contribute to the various theories surrounding leadership attributes. I agree with Yukl's (2006) definition of leadership, which encompasses individual traits, behavior, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an executive position. This definition of leadership is inclusive in its approach and focuses on the varying degrees of one's leadership methodology. Due to these varying degrees, I am convinced that Yukl's definition of leadership is particularly beneficial when

interviewing historically marginalized populations and becomes a step closer to understanding African American leadership.

A History of African American Leadership and Supporting Research

Considering that this research centers on African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies, it is important to understand the history of African American leadership. One may argue that leadership is simply leadership and that there should be no distinction between cultures and ethnicities. However, cultures and ethnicities tend to play a significant role in the leadership domain. One's identity is often at the forefront of this discussion. Chávez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) offered racial identity as a surface-level manifestation which determines the treatment of individuals based on what one looks like. The authors argued that positive ethnic group messages and support are not enough to counteract negative public images. The recipients of these negative image relations are likely to feel shame or a disconnection toward their own ethnic identity.

Identity is a prevalent issue when one must come to terms with in being different from the majority and outsider perceptions. Understanding identity can be very complex especially when an African American enters the corporate environment. Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012) implemented the Black identity development model to magnify the different stages one travels through to gain (or not) enlightenment and self-worth. Table 1 presents Wijeyesinghe's and Jackson's Black Identity Development (BID) model with a description of its stages.

Table 1

Black Identity Development Stages

Stage One Naïve	This is considered to be the naïve stage where little or no conscious social awareness of race is present. Children typically fall within this stage and are vulnerable to logics and socializing agents. Curiosity is developed and children begin to understand the differences between people but have not learned to value other differences in the social world.
Stage Two Acceptance	This stage represents internalization, conscious or unconscious of ideological racial dominances and subordination in one's public and private life. An individual at this stage is confronted by the effects of racism. The person has internalized the negative messages of what it means to be black in the US. Seeking approval, self-worth, good, power and money, the notion of "white is right" (p. 42).
Stage Three Resistance	This stage Blacks understand and recognize racism's complexities and manifestations. Individuals in this stage become well aware of covert and overt racism and the impact on Black people. The individuals in this stage develop a growing hostility toward White people, as well as other Blacks and minorities who "collude" (p. 43) with manifestations of racism by Whites. They also realize that by embracing this stage, they lose the benefits of the acceptance stage. Passive Resistance is favored in an effort to remain in good standing with Whites while still rejecting racism.
Stage Four Redefinition	A Black person in this stage focuses on building relationships with other Blacks that are in the same level of consciousness. Individuals are not concerned with emulating or rejecting Whites or White culture and does not find interaction with Whites necessary or useful in a quest for self and racial identity. The Black perspective is viewed as the most salient in one's life. The individual is focused on reclaiming one's Black culture and does not find it beneficial to react to White people, institutions, or culture.
Stage Five Internalization	Individuals in this stage integrate newly defined aspects of Black culture. Black people are no longer concerned with explaining, defending, or protecting their Black identity. Nurturing is seen as the most prevalent when the environment ignores, degrades, or attacks all that is Black. Some Blacks in this stage will adopt a multicultural perspective and incorporate their ideals. W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou are considered as the few public figures to have reached this stage.

Each stage discusses the mentality an individual must have to progress to the fifth and final stage. It is important to note that only a limited number of adults progress to this stage. Most notably, Wijeyesinghe and Jackson identified W.E.B. DuBois, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou as the select few public figures who have progressed to stage five in the BID model.

Given that identity plays such a significant role in one's development, I wonder where the Fortune 500 CEOs would fall within these stages. I also wonder if these stages are necessary in order to be a modern-day leader, especially after stage one. Within the ensuing pages, acceptance and becoming a "sellout" are discussed in terms of whether they contribute to or impede the success of an African American executive within the dominant culture.

The lack of research on African American leadership and the importance of racial identity may be a contributing factor to why people (non-Blacks in particular) agree with Walters and Smith's (1999) assertion that African American leadership tends to rely heavily on the Black political structure. They posit that Black conservatives tend to represent the Black constituency (district elective officers); however, their role is not that of leading Black people but of leading White opinion about Blacks. Holden (1973) understood Black leadership to mean individuals who seek the interests of the entire Black population. Holden furthered that the effectiveness of a Black leader was dependent upon the leader's understandings of the relationship to Whites. Considering that there have been 16 African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies in the list's 60-year existence, could one state emphatically that these particular Blacks understood their relationship to Whites whereas others failed to do so? This could very well be the

case; however, the issue seems to be more complex. This is evident in a statement made by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Marshall stated that he was not “free” as a Black in America in a 1991 press statement (Morrison, 1992). Although Marshall was one of the highest-ranking Black men in the country at the time, he compared his experience with that of a well-traveled Pullman porter he had once known who had never been in any city in the United States and had to put his hand in front of his face to discover that he was Black. In an effort to contextualize Marshall’s identity, the statement arguably resembles one who has reached stage four (redefinition) of Black identity development mainly because the Black perspective is the most salient in one’s life. His statement signified the disparities between race in this country, and although shocking to a few because of his position and status in society, many African Americans were unfazed by his statement. Although Marshall’s statement was uttered over 20 years ago, Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012) questioned, “How will Black Americans experience their identity development when there are no living representatives of the civil rights era to share first-person narratives of the struggle?” (p. 47). The authors continued to probe: “Will there be another civil rights-type struggle that will cause the next new racial awakening?” (p. 47). The answer to Wijeyesinghe and Jackson’s question is abundantly clear, considering the current racial unrest. In addition to questioning the existence of another civil rights struggle, Blacks in leadership positions come into question. There do not appear to be any revolutionary leaders at the current time.

Although there has been progress with employment of Black males in corporate America since Marshall’s statement and Wijeyesinghe and Jackson’s query, existing gaps

still remain in the social mobility of Blacks in executive corporate positions, notwithstanding the abolishment of one's self-identity. When referring to Black politicians and intellectual leaders, West (1993) suggested, "To be a serious black leader is to be a race-transcending prophet who critiques the powers that be (including the black component of the Establishment) and who puts forward a vision of fundamental social change for all who suffer from socially induced misery" (p. 70). Perhaps providing an end to this socially induced misery, as West suggested, can be a way in which a leader gives back to his or her community.

"Giving Back" to the Community

A standard definition of community may offer further insight into West's (1993) argument. According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (2015), a community can be defined as a group of people who live within the same area and/or people who have the same interests (i.e., religion, race, etc.). From a geographic standpoint (others may argue globally), the African American community has been at the forefront of media images due to the current uprising of racial unrest. Churches and protesters alike have spoken out against police brutality, substandard living conditions, and gentrification within many predominately Black "communities."

"The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men" (Du Bois, 1986, p. 861). Du Bois made it clear that paying it forward was a way in which one gave back to one's community. Arguably, in today's world, the term has become loosely defined when individuals mention community. In minority populations, giving back appears to be expected when one reaches a certain level of "success" above the

traditional working class. During a daytime interview,¹ comedian Chris Rock argued that Black people are always asked to give back and one never hears that being asked of a White person (Williams, 2014).

Rock's statement may be the case given that he is a wealthy public figure. However, this begs the question of the meaning of "Black community." Grayman (2009) conducted an exploratory study on the individual meaning of the "black community." The study included 60 African American participants (30 males and 30 females) between the ages of 21 and over 70 who were located in the mid-Atlantic urban regions of the United States. The study categorized the term *Black community* by themes, which are listed along with a brief explanation in Table 2, which represents Grayman's (2009) study on the Black community according to Black adults in America.

The majority of the participants in the study referred to community as cultural (19) more than any other definition, followed by residential (16) and globalized (14). The term *culture* can also be complex and deserves an individual study to highlight its many components. In Grayman's (2009) study, culture entailed art, history, and politics as the majority of responses. Residential responses focused more on where individuals lived and congregated, whereas globalized elicited responses based on the Black community as a global society. Globalization when referring to the Black community was referenced more from the young and middle-aged adults, primarily due to work-related travel and/or living abroad. For African Americans who do not have the opportunity to travel or live abroad, their communal reality can often represent a bleak outlook.

¹ Chris Rock, Top Five on *The Wendy Williams Show*, published December 12, 2014.

Table 2

Definitions of the Black Community

Theme	Description
Cultural	Shared symbols, patters of meaning inclusive of behavioral norms distributed intergenerationally within a group.
Residential	Physical locations where people live and interact
Globalized	Diversity, expansiveness, all-encompassing and international grouping
Supportive	Unity, mutuality, and engagement in action on others' behalf
Visibly distinctive	Based on color, race, and phenotype
Socioeconomic	Financial status and financial condition
Nonactualized	Community as responsibility (role models)
Non-differential	Sameness, common humanity, and non-distinctiveness
Nihilistic	Negative connotations, physically and/or psychologically destructive
Non-definable	Unable to define a definition
Other	Indecipherable responses or ones that did not fit into a category

West (1993) posited that Black communities are in “shambles” (p. 56). He added that Black families are declining, coupled with Black men and women in conflict, which can sometimes turn into “combat” (p. 56). To add to West’s analysis, perhaps the unemployed and underemployed become so poverty-stricken that their strength for engaging in combat has become desolate. With this in mind, where does the African American Fortune 500 CEO fit in terms of defining his or her sense of community? It is my perspective that the African American CEO may in fact encompass all of these components or may describe something entirely different. One may wonder if financial

status and prestige in terms of “community”—more specifically, Black community—sets forth a different lens by the ways in which one views the term. Moreover, the Black middle class is a matter of “professional conscientiousness” (p. 57), one’s personal accomplishment and restrained adjustment (West, 1993). The question is rather: Does professional conscientiousness protect one from being a recipient of racism?

Racism

When Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th President on January 20, 2009, commentators and ordinary Americans declared that Blacks in the United States had overcome (Pinkett et al., 2011). This euphoric revolution was debunked within the first 50 days of Obama’s presidency. Pinkett et al. (2011) agreed that critics and talking heads alike required immediate economical fixes from Obama within the first 50 days of his presidency. Later that year, South Carolina representative Joe Wilson distastefully shouted “You lie!” (p. 60) during Obama’s first congressional address (Pinkett et al., 2011). This left many African Americans unsettled and questioned if other presidents had been treated disrespectfully in a similar American formal setting. The repetitive question becomes “Can I be judged on my merits, or will race always be a factor?” (p. 60).

I believe that it would be detrimental to this study to discuss African American leadership without discussing the topic of race. The constructs of race and ethnicity are difficult to define and frame in the United States (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). In the early part of the 1900s, eugenics and social Darwinism attempted to construct race by one’s physicality and biological category (Tompkins, 2005). Sir Francis Galton coined the term *eugenics* in 1883, which is described as a process of improving the “stock” of

the human population (Galton, 1904, p. 35). Galton (1904) referred to the preservation of a superior stock; “eugenics is the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (p. 35). Winfield (2007) argued that eugenics serves as an effort to eliminate “non-white segments” (p. xviii) of the population and was not developed by an extremist sect in the United States; “professors, ivy league universities, wealthy philanthropists and industrialists, educators, armies of social workers and medical professionals, and government officials” of all stripes contributed to this belief. “Cloaked in a mantle of respectable science, eugenics relied heavily on a pre-existing stream of historical consciousness comprised of base racism, ethnic hatred, and academic elitism” (p. xviii).

Social Darwinism was first used by Yale professor William Graham Sumner in 1914 and later referred to as “survival of the fittest” by English philosopher Herbert Spencer (Winfield, 2007). Survival of the fittest argued that government and social institutions should not regulate natural processes that occur within the social order (Winfield, 2007). Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* propelled the work of Spencer’s ideas into Social Darwinism ideology. To put it simply:

Social Darwinist were steadfastly against all governmental programs to aid the poor. It was precisely a reaction to this mentality that led to the rise of the Progressive movement and the subsequent translation by eugenicists of previously held beliefs regarding race and inferiority into more palatable Progressive language. (Winfield, 2007, pp. 54-55)

Winfield argued that Social Darwinism and eugenics “are used extensively to justify and moralize the maintenance of the status quo for European Americans economically as well as ideologically” (p. 53).

As a result, race is categorized as a social construct that plays a significant role in determining a person's life expectancy, quality of life, educational possibilities that will or will not be available, and the manner in which that person will be viewed in society—more specifically, their racial affiliation (Tompkins, 2005). According to Omi and Winant (2015), race is a way of “making up people” (p. 105). Moreover, race can be viewed as a process of “othering” (p. 105). “Gender, class, sexuality, religion, culture, language, nationality, and age, among other perceived distinctions, are frequently evoked to justify structures of inequality, differential treatment, subordinate status, and in some cases violent conflict and war” (p. 105). The authors argued that social beings must categorize people in order to navigate in the world and discern who is to be considered a friend or foe. This also allows individuals to situate themselves within social hierarchies and provide clues to determine our social interactions with groups and individuals with whom we come in contact. They argued that class stratification in the United States has been affected by race and racism, which then contributes to the inequalities specifically linked to the maintenance of “White supremacy” (p. 105).

Race is a fundamental organizing principle of social stratification. It has influenced the definition of rights and privileges, the distribution of resources, and the ideologies and practices of subordination and oppression.... It is a template for the processes of marginalization that continue to shape social structures as well as collective and individual psyches. (p. 107)

According to Pinkett et al. (2011), meritocracy is very illusive in America and Black people are often concerned about how they are viewed by decision makers. The lingering question of whether decision makers are evaluating one based on education, skills, performance, character, or skin color appears to be a constant phenomenon. As a biological category, Europeans grouped people hierarchically by physical ability and

moral quality, placing Caucasians at the pinnacle, followed by Asians, Native Americans, and Africans last on the list (Chávez & Guido-Di-Brito, 1999; Spickard, 1992). This grouping established a racial separation, leaving the ones at the bottom of this list as outsiders (strangers).

In the *Souls of Black Folk* (1904/1994), Du Bois posed the question, “Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” Perhaps being a stranger appears to be what many African Americans feel while living in America—more specifically, in the corporate arena. Although African Americans have made significant strides since the Jim Crow era, race is currently at the forefront of American society. With the Trayvon Martins, Eric Garners, Sandra Blands, Mike Browns, and so many other unmentioned human tragedies, it would appear to be virtually impossible to negate racial injustices with the claim that racism is dead. Consequently, there are arguments in defense of the perpetrators in each of these tragic catastrophes. According to West (1993), to engage in conversations about race in America, we must begin with the flaws of American society as opposed to focusing on the problems of Black people. West further stated that America’s flaws are rooted in historic inequalities and repetitive stereotypes. Sealey-Ruiz (2010) echoed this sentiment by offering that to rid the world of racism, America would need to rewrite historical textbooks and include the significance of African Americans in history. Racial disparities become even more complex when gender becomes a part of the predisposition.

Cornileus (2013) conducted a qualitative study with 14 African American professionals (i.e., college degree, experience or specialized training) which focused on the impact of racism on their career development. This study concentrated specifically on

African American men because issues facing African American men are viewed differently than issues facing African American women (Bingham & Ward, 2001; Cornileus, 2013). “The universal approach to understand African Americans’ career development experiences is problematic because it has rendered invisible the range of experiences germane to African American professional men in corporate America” (Cornileus, 2013, p. 445). Cornileus furthered that African American men in particular are twice as likely to be unemployed as their White counterparts. In addition, they earn 20% less compensation, and the greatest disparity exists in the higher echelons of corporate America (Cornileus, 2013; Grodsky & Pager, 2001; Taylor, 2004; U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Another factor is that African American men more than women encounter gender racism, negative stereotypes, and oppression because they are Black and men—contributing to the Black man phenomenon (Cornileus, 2013; Mutua, 2006).

Nevertheless, a *Harvard Law Review* study (1991) revealed that Black men and women experience discrimination distinctive to their history and social position. Moreover, many employers refuse to extend to Black men the same equal employment opportunities they tend to extend to Black women (Cornileus, 2013). Cornileus posited that this discrepancy is likely attributed to the accessible data on African American women and their career experiences by way of feminist scholars (e.g., Alfred, 2001; Bierema, 2001; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998), which have led to unveiling the dominant forces at play with career development. In Cornileus’s (2013) study, several participants agreed that the stereotype of the “angry black man” (p. 453) is common in corporate America and usually stipulates career suicide. Participants in the study also

indicated that “if a Black male speaks in a manner that suggests he is smarter or more educated than his White counterparts, I can see that being a source of problem” (p. 453). To avoid this dilemma, participants typically downplayed their credentials and education to avoid scrutiny (Cornileus, 2013).

In terms of career advancement, the majority of participants discussed the notion of career plateaus at a certain level. The blame for this plateau was directed at human resources and senior management. This coincides with Harper’s (2013) study in which the majority of participants agreed that African Americans were not advanced into upper executive roles because of stereotyping and human resource practices. With relation to the angry Black man reference, a participant, who was responding to the effects of racial challenges to one’s leadership style from Harper’s study, stated, “You either do more or you do less. It would look bad for an African American to have an explosive temper. Obama cannot be seen being aggressive like Lyndon B. Johnson was. Obama will be labeled the angry Black man” (p. 64). This example was even more evident today as Republican presidential candidates, businessman Donald Trump and neurosurgeon Ben Carson, ran for the 2016 White House. Trump (Caucasian) was viewed as boisterous, loud, and aggressive, which many called confidence; Dr. Carson (African American) was soft-spoken and seen as not “aggressive” enough. Once again, education came into play with these two candidates in terms of qualifications (Medical Degree vs. Bachelor’s Degree), even though neither had political experience.

Regarding advanced education, there is an apparent misguided stereotype. In Bacchus’s (2004) study, African American males held a greater number of advanced degrees than their Caucasian counterparts. This analysis was also evident in a random

sample of White males in corporate America (Marquis, 2002-2003). The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2011) revealed that 40% of all educational doctorates in America were obtained by African Americans, yet very few occupied upper administrative roles in higher educational institutions. This deficiency appears to be consistent with the corporate arena. Interestingly, Judge, Cable, Boudrea, and Bretz (1995) noted that CEOs generally have earned MBAs or law degrees, which related to their career success. Upon reviewing the educational backgrounds of former and current African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies, the analysis across the board points to advanced degrees from prestigious institutions. This begs the question of whether it is more important for an African American to hold an advanced degree as opposed to their Caucasian counterparts. Essentially, an African American must hold an advanced degree when applying for the same position as a Caucasian with a lower level of education. In Harper's (2013) study on African American community college chancellors in California, 81.9% of the chancellors interviewed either agreed or strongly agreed that it was more important for an African American to obtain a doctoral degree than it was for a Caucasian while seeking the position of chancellor.

Perhaps a viable antidote to racism is for everyone to become what Sealey-Ruiz referred to as racially literate (Sealey-Ruiz, 2011). Individuals who are racially literate are able to discuss the implications of American racism constructively. She argued that "the concept of race is deeply rooted in our lives and is articulated through our legal system and schools; it affects how we think, speak, and perform culture" (p. 26).

The imbalances continue to be tallied on a never-ending list. The question is: Does an African American ever reach a point where he or she is exonerated from the

nuances of racism? One can assume that Fortune 500 CEOs, celebrities, and renowned educators do not encounter these nuances. Or do they?

Blacks With Power, Notoriety, and/or Education

“How does it feel to be a problem?” (Du Bois, 1986, p. 363). Du Bois posed this question when referring to the African American presence in White society. This society is reflected in today’s upper echelons of the corporate arena, where 2% of leaders are African American executives (Isidore, 2012).

Unknowingly, many equate this shortfall with Bill O’Reilly’s (2015) suggestion: “more education and less fatherless homes in the black community” (n.p). In terms of education and notoriety, there appears to be a misguided glimmer of hope that racism will become obsolete and only serve as a state of mind for the everyday person (non-celebrity) and academically uneducated. Henry Louis Gates Jr., Oprah Winfrey, Jay-Z, James Blake, and Bernard Tyson are just a few examples of what education and/or notoriety offer African Americans in terms of a post-racial society.

The Professor: Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a world-renowned professor from Harvard University, was arrested on the doorsteps of his home because a neighbor called and said there was an intruder on Gates’ property. Even though Gates uses a walking cane, it was daylight hours and he is well known in his neighboring community. He had struggled to open the front door of his home with luggage in tow. He was asked by a police officer to provide his identification. When the officer arrived requesting the identification, Gates was already comfortably inside his home. Although Gates provided two forms of

identification (Harvard University faculty ID and a driver's license), the officer treated him unjustly; Gates requested his badge number and the officer refused (Trujillo, 2009). Frustrated by the disregard, Gates mentioned that his treatment was due to him being "a black man in America" (Trujillo, 2009, para. 2). Gates was later arrested for disorderly conduct.

Shortly after the incident, President Obama made a public statement referring to the officer as one who "acted stupidly" (para. 1) and continued by citing statistical data that African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately stopped by law enforcement in this country (CNN, 2009). The officer refused to apologize for the incident, despite being persuaded by the Cambridge Mayor. After Obama's statement, the press listed him as being partisan to the issue and "obnoxious" (Hawkins, 2012, para. 10), perhaps even anti-patriotic. Obama later created what many coined the "beer summit" in the back lawn of the White House, with Gates, the arresting officer, Vice President Joe Biden, and himself gathered for a private discussion (Feller, 2009).

The Billionaire Entertainment Mogul: Oprah Winfrey

While on vacation in Paris during the summer of 2005, Oprah Winfrey was denied access into Hermès, an upscale boutique. There were reports that the store did not recognize Winfrey and made a racial comment that "we have been having problems with North Africans lately" (Givhan, 2005, para. 2). All the while, Winfrey witnessed active shoppers inside while she remained outside of the boutique. Winfrey's famous confidant Gayle King argued that if Celine Dion or Barbara Streisand wanted to shop, the store's manager would have accommodated them (Givhan, 2005). Although Winfrey is a world-renowned celebrity and billionaire television mogul, she was not at the time dazzled up

with pristine hair or makeup or accompanied by a slew of body guards. “Oprah musta forgot she was black” while visiting the Parisian boutique (Givhan, 2005, para. 3).

When Winfrey’s syndicated television show returned from hiatus the following season, Robert Chavez, President of Hermès, appeared as a guest. In front of the large studio audience, Chavez commented that the employees of the boutique did not know who Winfrey was. The audience gasped at his comment as Winfrey negated notoriety was the issue. Winfrey then addressed the many letters she had received from fans and the general public asking her if they should shop at Hermès. Her response was “Shop, shop, shop. Shop away, people” (Roberts, 2005, n.p.).

In 2013, Winfrey visited a boutique in Switzerland and was denied a request to view an “expensive” purse. Regarding the Switzerland incident, Winfrey stated on *Entertainment Tonight*, “I could’ve had the whole blow-up thing and thrown down the black card, but why do that? But that clearly is, you know...it [racism] still exists” (Reals, 2013, para. 7).

The Famous Rapper and Business Mogul: Jay-Z

In 2013, several African American shoppers were subjected to racial profiling at Barneys in Manhattan. These incidents prompted many to boycott the department store and called on business mogul and rapper Jay-Z to cancel his upcoming limited collection clothing partnership with the retailer (Gerick & Brown, 2013). A significant portion of the proceeds from Jay-Z’s collection was set to benefit a local nonprofit organization and provide educational scholarships. After remaining silent on the issue for some time, Jay-Z commented, “I have agreed to move forward with the launch of BNY SCC collection under the condition that I have a leadership role and seat on a council specifically

convened to deal with the issue of racial profiling” (Mukherjee, 2013, para. 6). Many supporters of the artist became critics of his response, referring to it as being highly corporate and hypocritical. The hypocrisy claim stemmed from a prior incident in which an executive at Cristal champagne suggested that rappers should drink Dom Perignon or Krug instead (less quality); Jay Z later boycotted Cristal altogether because of this comment (Mukherjee, 2013).

The Famous Athlete: James Blake

While visiting New York for the 2015 U.S. Open events, former tennis star James Blake (graduate of Harvard) was tackled to the ground in front of his midtown hotel. The officer claimed this was a case of mistaken identity (Coffey, Moore, & Mcshane, 2015). The assault was filmed on hotel surveillance cameras and played continuously on media networks across the nation. Blake was not offered an apology from the NYPD officer. During an interview, Blake stated, “it was definitely scary...there’s probably a race factor involved, but no matter what there’s no reason for anybody to do that to anybody” (Coffey et al., 2015, para. 3). Interestingly enough, the officer who tackled Blake was previously sued four times for excessive force.

The CEO: Bernard Tyson

Labeled the third most influential leader in healthcare by *Modern Healthcare* magazine, the CEO of Kaiser, Bernard Tyson, discussed his experiences as a Black executive in a LinkedIn online post. Tyson (2014) posited that despite being the chairman and CEO of a \$55-billion dollar organization, he too was profiled while shopping at an upscale store, asked to provide his identification when paying with a credit card (White

customers ahead of him usually were not), and was often explained the tipping program when dining at an upscale restaurant. Tyson offered this statement:

You would think my experience as a top executive would be different from a Black man who is working in a retail or food service job to support his family. Yet, he and I both understand the commonality of the Black male experience that remains consistent no matter what the economic status or job title. (para. 2)

Tyson received few positive comments about his post but was also referred to by many as a complaining race-baiter.

Vignette Analysis: Selling Out or Political Savvy

Each of these incidents embodies experiences with racism on different levels; however, they are very similar in their context. Winfrey had the ability to produce a television segment regarding her Parisian Hermès experience and invited the President of the company on as a guest. One may argue that as opposed to staying adamant and capitalizing on her persuasive power with viewers of all races, she uttered the words “Shop, shop, shop.” Perhaps Hermès would have been taught a lesson had many from all races boycotted their products based on Winfrey’s request (*Los Angeles Times*, 2005). In Professor Gates’ case, he attended President Obama’s “beer summit,” leading many to conclude that there was some type of “misunderstanding” with the officer—giving him a pass or excusing his behavior. Despite Jay-Z’s influence, he decided to keep his clothing line at Barneys and avoided a direct response to the racism issue. In the case of Blake, he visited many media outlets to speak out against the NYPD’s relationship with African Americans. Tyson wrote a candid post based on his realities as an African American male after being emotionally prompted by the vast killings of unarmed Black men by law enforcement and did not back-pedal from his post.

One may argue that Blake and Tyson personified integrity by taking a stance against racism, whereas Winfrey, Gates, and Jay-z “sold out.” This notion of “selling out” is a controversial yet subjective term to begin with. *Merriam-Webster* (2015) defined sellout as “an occurrence in which you do something that does not agree with your beliefs, values, etc., especially in order to make money” (para. 2). Could their approach of how they handled their bouts with racism be strategic? Was it a sellout or was it being politically savvy? According to Deluca (1999), the savvy business person addresses conflicts with an approach of diplomacy to alleviate damaging others’ self-esteem. Deluca further stated that the savvy exude statesmanship and encourage people to rise above selfishness by appealing to one’s enlightened self-interest in an effort to benefit each other.

Who Benefits?

These vignettes beg the question: Who is really benefiting from this? Moreover, Winfrey and Jay-Z are CEOs of their respective companies, so do they owe it to their community to be a voice and speak out against racism at all costs? Is speaking about a racial experience enough to turn into an applied action? What additional measures can Tyson put into place as the Kaiser CEO to curtail workplace racial pitfalls, considering his experiences outside of the organization? Sealey-Ruiz (2010) discussed the notion of spillage and how unaddressed experiences with racism spill over into our conversations and how we treat one another unconsciously—and I would argue often consciously.

The individuals mentioned in these vignettes all have a certain amount of notoriety status and prestige. What happens to those without status? Shortly after Blake’s incident, he commented, “I have resources to get to the bottom of this. I have a voice. But

what about someone who doesn't have those resources and doesn't have a voice?" (Coffey et al., 2015, para. 26).

The CEO's Racial Obligation

An important question is: Do CEOs have to correct a detrimental issue within their organization, especially if they have positional power? Many may argue that CEOs and organizations do not have the ability to interfere with societal unjust causes. If that is the argument, one may question how the JetBlue CEO and Yankees Stadium executives were able to provide countless flights for police officers who wanted to attend slain New York officers funerals as well as a private Yankees meet-and-greet fundraiser (Mosendz, 2015; Prendergast & Velez, 2014). This was in light of the two slain Brooklyn police officers. Whose lives are disposable and valued and whose are not? Do Black lives, Black professionalism, status, and basic humanity matter? According to opponents of the Black Lives Matter movement, the response is: All lives matter.

Consequently, all lives mattering is not consistent with the rebuttal that considers that the families who lost loved ones to police violence were not flown across the country for free by a major airline or provided a meet-and-greet fundraiser (for their lost loved ones) with Yankees athletes.

Given the several complexities of race in America, how does one engage in a healthy dialogue at the corporate level, and what can/are African American CEOs doing as a response? Do CEOs actually experience these levels of racism leading a Fortune 500 company, considering their private jets, exclusive car service, personal security, and luxurious lifestyle? Perhaps these CEOs are being politically savvy or just alleviating Du Bois's notion of being a "problem."

Nevertheless, Bell (1992) believed that “no African Americans are insulated from racial discrimination. Our careers, even our lives are threatened because of our color” (p.3). It appears that Bell’s sentiment is relevant today and seen through the constant killings of unarmed African Americans.

Moreover, do all of the strides, prestige, accolades, education, and notoriety matter in the grander scheme of consciousness? Or is it simply what Malcolm X proclaimed in a public speech over 45 years ago: “What do you call a Black man with a PhD?” (Answer: The “N” word) (Fishkin, 2011). Conceivably, this question resonates today and is witnessed through recipients who are treated as the “N” word (disregarded and dehumanized) by those who deny their opportunity and humanity. The current societal conditions for Blacks begs the question: How is one mentored and prepared for the challenges of becoming a CEO of a Fortune 500 company?

Mentorship

Mentorship as a concept first appeared in the mid-1950s via business journals, but was introduced on a wider scale by Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) in the male psychological development study. The term itself has the ability to take on different meanings depending on the individual. According to Daloz (1999), mentorship is referred to as a relationship between an experienced elder and a younger learner, by which the mentor facilitates in knowledge sharing and provides support, inspiration, and challenge. This definition has expanded over the years to be more inclusive of all ages as well as peers. There is a difference between informal and formal approaches to mentorship in that informal mentoring focuses on everyday life

interactions, whereas formal mentoring is typically used as a form of job training, role modeling, and career advancement in the business world, higher education, governmental organizations, and the nonprofit sector (Daloz, 1999).

In academia, mentorship can be viewed as the relationship between tenure and nontenured professors or between professors and students. Considering that this study focused on the leadership trajectories of African American CEOs in a demanding corporate environment, mentorship may in fact be crucial; however, the percentage of African American executives in corporate America, as previously mentioned, is roughly 2% (Isidore, 2012). There appears to be a misunderstanding of who should classify as one's mentor. Blacks mentoring Blacks are likely to be few and far between, considering the numbers. Whatever the demographic, the foundation of a successful mentoring relationship is based on trust (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Establishing trust in a cross-cultural mentoring relationship becomes an issue more so than same-race mentoring (Brinson & Kottler, 1993; Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, & Williams, 1999; Thomas, 2001), especially when White and Black are placed together as the mentor and mentee, respectively. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) argued that the relationships between Black and White Americans have rested on the historical legacy of a two-sided scenario of mistrust.

Black Americans have endured hundreds of years of sufferings and abuse at the hands of white Americans who consistently espoused a mythical rhetoric of democracy and equality. Through hundreds of years of oppression blacks remained loyal citizens, fighting in every war, working peacefully in often menial jobs and waiting for the demise of Jim Crow so that they too could enjoy the American dream.... Despite the myth of the violent angry black, it is white American citizens who have acted against blacks through legislated segregation, discriminatory customs and mob violence (Franklin, 1963; Sitkoff, 1978). There are historical facts that should persuade whites to be comfortable with and to trust blacks, and yet they do not. There are historical facts that have convinced blacks

to mistrust whites and the mores within black culture support this perspective. It is across this backdrop of American history that cross-cultural mentoring must be constructed. (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004, p. 12)

Pinkett et al. (2011) argued that a significant barrier to a mentor/protégé relationship occurs when one is willing to discuss race while the other prefers not to discuss it. The authors contended that studies have found this creates tension within the relationship as well as disappointment by the one who is willing to discuss race. The one willing to discuss issues of race may feel avoided while the other remains uncomfortable. There should be an agreement at the beginning of the relationship of what /are deemed possible topics for discussion and which topics are off limits to alleviate the tension and potential pitfalls so that both may benefit from the relationship.

The beginnings of a cross-cultural, cross-racial mentoring relationship between a White mentor and Black mentee can be negatively impacted due to stereotypical patterns and behaviors that are often unrecognizable in the American psyche (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Thomas, 2001). The American psyche sets paradigms which dictate to the person of color, most often Black, to “stay in one’s place” (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004, p. 12); it refrains from what can be viewed as aggressive threatening behavior and avoids perceptions of intimacy. Research has indicated that people respond positively when they become engaged in productive relationships with good role models (Shea, 1994). Conversely, Blacks (males) in corporate America often occupy low-level entry jobs, which often leave them with an inadequate pool of mentors (Bacchus, 2004; Thomas, 2001).

Hayes (2008) also discussed the importance of mentorship and the limited access available to African American women in her study. Due to the convergence of race and

gender, African American females experienced more obstacles accessing mentoring relationships than White females (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Catalyst, 2004, 2006; Combs, 2003; Thomas, 2001). This was attributed to the fact that White women were able to leverage their Whiteness and forge relationships with White men who were most often best situated to offer career advice and sponsorship because of the positions they held in corporations (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Catalyst, 2004; Combs, 2003; Thomas, 2001). Suffice it to say, Caucasians are more likely to be mentored at a younger age, whereas Blacks are not mentored until middle management and tend to flourish from their mentoring (Thomas, 2001).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) reported that in today's economy, the tenure of individuals at companies is a mere 4.6 years. The likelihood of individuals "staying the course" to gain upper-management positions with limited mentorship is challenging, to say the least. In the article "The Truth About Mentoring Minorities: Race Matters," organizational behavior and human resource management professor David A. Thomas posited that minorities should be mentored differently than their White counterparts (Thomas, 2001). Acceptance and understanding of differences may be a precursor to establishing a mentor-mentee relationship. Considering the current racial unrest across America, one could wonder how these relationships are being formed. Although Americans usually refrain from politics, race, and religion at the workplace, in today's society with a 24/7 media cycle, one questions if this is even practical.

Harper's (2013) study included responses from current and previous African American community college chancellors in California, many of whom agreed that the lack of diversity at their institutions in top-tier executive positions was due to personnel

practices (based on preconceived negative stereotypes) and the absence of mentors. Moreover, when African Americans obtained the chancellor position, 63.6% of the 11 participants agreed (based on their personal experiences) that African Americans were judged more harshly by constituents and surrounding community members than their non-African American predecessors and/or successors, which could have been a result of the lack of mentorship. In addition to the lack of mentors, could this be attributed to a lack of “diversity?”

Diversity

Over the past two decades, the term *diversity* has taken on several different definitions within the organizational context and become more “inclusive.” According to Morrison (1992), the term *diversity* is confusing and controversial. Diversity is often viewed as an alternative to affirmative action, which has a negative connotation in many organizations because of its association with governmental enactment of quotas. Morrison posited that in an effort for organizations to make diversity more appealing, the term is being viewed as nothing more than an appreciation of differences that improve organizational performances. Thomas (2001) described diversity as a limitless number of similarities and differences that contribute to individuals’ uniqueness. Diversity can also be defined as “a process or a set of actions that typify how an organization responds to diversity” (Maltbia & Power, 2009, p. 41). Diversity can be defined in many ways and there does not appear to be a distinct definition of the term. There was a time in which the term *diversity* was used as a way to combat racial and gender discrimination in academia and the workplace. This may still be the case; however, the focus on particular terms

appears to have shifted. In their book *A Leader's Guide to Leveraging Diversity: Strategic Learning Capabilities for Breakthrough Performance*, Maltbia and Power (2009) presented a table in which award-winning companies acknowledged for their commitment to diversity displayed this shift (see Table 3 below).

Table 3

Sample Diversity Slogans

Organization	Description
Bank of America	Above all, we are about people. A philosophy of inclusion drives our organization every day and helps us win in a diverse, global marketplace.
Proctor & Gamble	Everyone at P&G is united by the commonality of the company's values and goals. We see diversity as the uniqueness each of us brings to fulfilling these values and achieving these goals. Our diversity covers a broad range of personal attributes and characteristics such as race, sex, age, cultural heritage, personal background, and sexual orientation. By building on our common values and goals, we are able to create an advantage from our differences.

List taken from Maltbia & Power (2009), p. 43

Bank of America in Table 3 is an example of how diversity is being defined in many organizational contexts; suffice it to say, they are an “award-winning” organization for their commitment to diversity. Proctor & Gamble's description is more indicative of tackling the issues of race and other marginalized variables. Arguably, race and gender often take a back seat to a company's commitment to what is defined as diversity.

Thomas and Ely (1996) listed three paradigms on how to engage diversity in a workplace:

1. discrimination and fairness paradigm—focuses on adhering to federal requirements;
2. the access and legitimacy paradigm—values diversity as a means of serving a wider pool of customers; and
3. learning and effectiveness paradigm—recognizes multiple backgrounds and experiences that contribute to individual identities and outlooks.

These paradigms could be beneficial to companies who are willing to embrace diversity for its intended purpose.

Embracing diversity also means challenging the slogans used by many HR professionals such as “highly qualified.” This is erroneous considering that the majority of African American executives had highly esteemed graduate degrees in various research studies, even more so than their Caucasian counterparts (Ates, 2003; Bacchus, 2004; Harper, 2013; Hayes, 2008; Mycroft, 2012).

Despite the limited opportunity, African Americans do obtain the top executive role and perform quite well. Mycroft’s (2012) study pointed out that there was no significant difference in the overall company financial performance between African American and Caucasian CEOs, despite the lack of mentoring provided to the African American CEOs. The questions remains: How might an African American CEO’s performance increase with mentorship? It is my hypothesis that these executives would learn to govern primarily by way of experience.

Experiential Learning

When it comes to African American CEOs, it is essential to understand the essence of experiential learning. Given the limited number of African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies and the lack of research done exclusively on these individuals, one might assume that their path to success and sustainability is due to experiential learning.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2000). The theory is called “Experiential Learning” to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process, an emphasis that distinguishes ELT from other learning theories. The term *experiential* is used therefore to differentiate ELT both from cognitive learning theories, which tend to emphasize cognition over affect, and behavioral learning theories that deny any role for subjective experience in the learning process.

Another reason the theory is called “experiential” is because of its intellectual origins in the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. Taken together, Dewey’s philosophical pragmatism, Lewin’s social psychology, and Piaget’s cognitive-developmental genetic epistemology form a unique perspective on learning and development (Kolb, 1984). In a more simplified way of explanation, experiential learning emphasizes doing the task in order to learn it, and this doing may include self-directed learning activities (Merriam, 2001).

Experiential learning is described in two main senses. First, it is used to describe prior learning from the life experiences of the learner that is brought to a new situation. Second, and by far the most common use of the term, is to refer to the learning processes in which the experience of the learner is used as the prime source and stimulus for learning. Dewey (1938) believed that all genuine education came about through an experience. In his view, for learning to happen through experience, the experience had to exhibit two major principles—continuity and interaction. The continuity principle relied on the belief that all experiences were carried forward and influenced future experiences (Dewey, 1938). Dewey furthered that principle interaction defines what an experience was by the interaction of the individual and his or her relationship to the environment at the time.

According to Sternberg (1988), the experiential part of intelligence underlies an individual's response to life experiences. These range along a continuum from highly novel experiences to highly familiar experiences, for which responses have become automatic. Intelligence involves the ability to reason about and learn from new experiences, resulting in the development of new knowledge and skills and new executive strategies. Novelty can be a function of the context in which tasks are to be carried out or of the unfamiliarity of the tasks themselves. One can speculate whether a person has learned from an experience by his or her reactions to the experience.

Another caveat to experiential learning is experiential intelligence, which involves bringing into play the fundamental components of intelligence in both novel and routine tasks (Sternberg, 1988). Sternberg (1988) added that, in adult education, for example, we are concerned about the transition from school to work and the transfer of knowledge

from one context to another. Sternberg defined the ability to make such transitions and transfers successfully as aspects of experiential intelligence, or one's ability to retain composure in a novel situation.

The contextual part of intelligence underlines an individual's ability to be street smart by:

- adapting to, selecting, and shaping the environments in which he or she must function; and
- knowing when to challenge others or change the environment itself, or, in the words of the song, "know when to hold, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run" (Sternberg, 1988, p.58).

Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) pointed out that experience-based learning (EBL) is based on a set of assumptions about learning from experience. They are as follows:

- experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning;
- learners actively construct their own experience;
- learning is a holistic process;
- learning is socially and culturally constructed; and
- learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

A key element of EBL is that learners analyze their experience by reflecting, evaluating, and reconstructing it (sometimes individually, sometimes collectively, sometimes both) in order to draw meaning from it in light of prior experience. I would agree that this is the case for almost all experience-based learning. As an addendum to this thinking, I would offer the assumption that there are those who learn based on others'

experiences. This assumption points directly to the African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies. To better understand the experiential process and for the purposes of this research, I refer to Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning.

David Kolb is best known for laying the foundations of modern experiential education theory. His Experiential Learning theory has become a foundational text in this area. His experiential learning cycle, greatly influenced by Kurt Lewin, has been widely reproduced and used (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) believed that

continued reflection upon earlier experiences in order to add to and transform them into deeper understanding was necessary. This process lasts as long as the learner lives and has access to memory. The quality of reflective thought brought by the learner is of greater significance to the eventual learning outcomes than the nature of the experience itself. Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. (p. 38)

Kolb's experiential learning theory works on two levels: a four-step experiential learning cycle and four learning styles. The learning cycle includes the following steps:

1. Concrete Experience (doing/having an experience—a new experience is encountered or a reinterpretation of existing experience);
2. Reflective Observation (reviewing/reflecting on the experience);
3. Abstract Conceptualization (concluding/learning from the experience); and
4. Active experimentation (planning/trying out what you learned).

Figure 1 below displays Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning

Kolb's theory can be viewed as constructivist because it emphasizes reflection on experience. The first element, concrete experience, is about the openness and willingness to involve oneself in new experiences. Reflective observation is needed so that new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. Next, there is abstract conceptualization so integrative ideas and concepts can be created from observations and

reflection. Finally, there is active experimentation so new ideas and concepts can be used in practice. The cycle can begin at any of the four steps; it should be approached as a continuous circle and suggests continuous process and growth. Kolb produced a learning style inventory (LSI) that enables the identification of students' preferred learning styles.

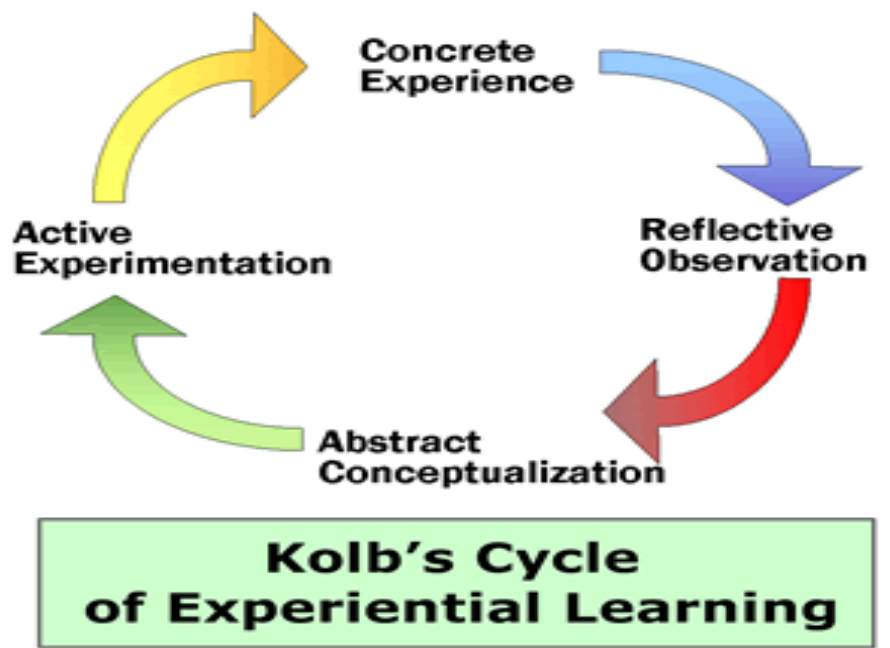


image by Karin Kirk

Figure 1. Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning

The learning styles are Diverging, Assimilating, Converging, and Accommodating (DACA):

- **Diverging** (feeling and watching—good at generating ideas, imaginative abilities);
- **Assimilating** (watching and thinking—ability to create theoretical models, excels in inductive reasoning);

- **Converging** (doing and thinking—strong practical application of ideas, unemotional); and
- **Accommodating** (doing and feeling—greatest strength is doing things, more of risk taker, solves problems intuitively, performs well when required to react to immediate circumstances).

Kolb's learning styles are well developed and respected; however, the question is:

How does this correlate with African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies?

Considering that the CEOs are in a high-performing scrutinizing position, their capacity to maintain sustainability relies heavily on divergence, assimilation, convergence, and accommodation. Many would argue that their diverging ideas must go beyond the spectrum of creativity in order to be respected among peers who come from entirely different backgrounds. Assimilation may or may not be a focal point in their learning objectives; however, CEOs are highly regarded for their inductive reasoning.

Convergence of ideas for African American CEOs is crucial to their success because stakeholders generally respond to their collective views being implemented within an organization. African American CEOs must understand the ideas of stakeholders whose realities may differ from their own. Accommodation plays an important role in discovering how the CEOs are able to accommodate in a position held by very few people who look like them. It would be interesting to discover the strategies that these executives refer to when trying to accommodate peers and subordinates.

Foundational/Relevant Literature

In a survey of more than 700 chief executives conducted by Margerison and Kakabadse (1984) for the American Management Association (AMA), it was found that

the earlier the leadership experience, the more successful the leaders were. According to the CEOs in the study, leadership is a practical skill that can only be learned through actual experience and before the age of 30. Researchers have found that little of what is taught in college and/or business schools prepares would-be managers for the realities of the executive world (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). Dowling (1978) posited that leaders cannot rely on any book to find out what to do in a managerial position. However, learning all this before the age of 30 seems very difficult for African American CEOs because many lack mentors and typically become immersed in their careers during middle management usually only after the age of 30. This by no means assumes that the CEOs have no leadership experience; rather, it just points to the lack of data readily available on the African American CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. In another study, 73% of the graduates surveyed reported that their MBA skills were not significant to their management position. The study concluded that one learns to be a leader by serving as a leader (McCall et al., 1988).

McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) conducted an extensive study of 191 successful executives from six major corporations. They discovered that the training experiences that made the most difference on the performance of executives was based solely on timing. Executives garnered motivation by completing something they wanted to accomplish, and this relied heavily on self-confidence. Interestingly, mentoring and teacher relationships were virtually non-existent among the executives. This may, in fact, have contributed to the success of the African American CEOs in that many of them lacked mentors, although “arguably” they were successful in their positions. Conversely, previous studies have indicated the need for mentors (Ates, 2003; Bacchus, 2004; Harper,

2013; Hayes, 2008; Mycroft, 2012), yet this analysis may be contradictory to the success of the current and former CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. In an effort to resolve this contradiction, African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies must be interviewed.

McCall et al. (1988) listed several monologues provided by their participants on their views about experiential learning. One executive in particular was placed on a secret acquisition team to buy out a supplier of computer parts. He was limited in his knowledge of acquisitions, and because of the secret nature of the project, he could not openly ask for the information. When he began to suspect that the company he was set to acquire appeared off kilter, he broke off all negotiations despite senior management advice. Luckily for him, the company he almost acquired went out of business shortly thereafter and his judgment was vindicated. Although he was a novice, he has learned a valuable lesson about his ability to handle new situations and standing up for his convictions. McCall et al. pointed to valuable lessons for leaders to analyze when making decisions; one cannot be an expert on everything; one must understand the other person's point of view and learn to cope with ambiguity. Ambiguity is often the reality for many leaders entering a new position, as it can also be the case for educators.

In Yorks and Kasl (2002), Kasl described her experience as an adult educator when she initiated an activity surrounding White consciousness. She separated the students (six African Americans and 12 White students including herself) by race. Kasl chose the synergic inquiry process because it provides systematic procedures for helping people learn from experience about themselves and others (Elias, 2000; Tang, 1997). The groups met in and outside of class over a period of 3 months to rehearse their presentations. On presentation day, the Black students performed first while standing in

front of a mural they painted with bold colors. Kasl described their presentation as one of encouragement and revealing Black self-knowing as oppositional consciousness. When the White students performed, there were shouts of irritation by the White students such as “You’re doing it wrong!” Towards the end of the performance, Kasl looked at the Black student team, hoping for acceptance of their performance and noticed that the team pointed towards her feet in horror. When Kasl looked at what the team was pointing out, she noticed that her team (the White team) had knocked over their presentational pieces along with a vase full of water and flowers. When it was time to reflect, the White team commented on the unity in the Black team and the Black team discussed their disturbance with the White team’s presentation. The Black team compared the White performance to what they inherently felt from society (White unconscious). One student revealed that she now understood that Whites do not necessarily do malicious things intentionally; many are unconscious of their behavior (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Kasl’s story illustrates different approaches from the learned experience. The White team created meaning primarily through discourse up until the chaotic presentation. Both teams were able to engage in reflective discourse about their perceptions of self and one another. Kasl stated that she and the other students realized “what it means to be white” (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 179).

Although Kasl is not a Fortune 500 CEO, she is an experienced educator who learned the differences about her own and others’ perceptions through an experiential exercise. In the exercise, she was the “CEO” of the classroom, yet she was able to comprehend McCall et al.’s recommendation on understanding the other person’s point of view.

Limitations and Patterns

Experiential learning is relevant to studying African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies. Given that the CEOs are all relatively the first of their race to occupy their position at their companies, learning from experience appears to be their go-to method. The CEOs encounter daily situations which may be foreign to their point of reference, particularly when dealing with colleagues and subordinates of different ethnicities. It is one thing to be a peer with someone of a different race, but being a superior assumes a different aspect. The research has indicated that experiential learning serves as a viable tool for analyzing high-level executives in organizations where education has missed the mark (Margerison & Kakabadse, 1984; McCall et al., 1988). Patterns across studies revealed that analyzing experiences and reporting one's reflection of those experiences is a remedy for best practice in an organizational setting. Yorks and Kasl (2002) would also agree that experiential learning brings about reflective discourse—hence, promoting the need to reflect on one's experience and translate that into one's organizational governance.

With every learning theory, there are the critiques. Kolb's model has been criticized for paying insufficient attention to the process of reflection (Boud et al., 1993). Fenwick (2003) argued that Kolb popularized the assumption that experience is concrete and split from reflection as though doing and thinking are separate states. Reflection is treated as separate from the experience, yet it is experienced. Dewey (1938) believed the model takes very little account of different cultural experiences/conditions; the idea of stages or steps does not sit well with the reality of thinking. Suffice it to say, the critiques,

however warranted, do not negate the benefits of utilizing Kolb's model or experiential learning in general for the purposes of this study.

A Model to Consider

“To get ahead in America one must shed his distinct ethnic identity and become something new.... This metaphor overlooked the history of African Americans who were brought to this country against their will (and Native Americans, who were displaced or decimated by European colonialists)” (Pinkett et al., 2011, p. 22). Is becoming something “new” and adjusting one's way of life to fit the status quo a strategy to ensure one's leadership trajectory?

To better understand the complexities and benchmarks an African American executive must achieve to maintain identity and ensure greatness in the professional landscape, Pinkett et al. (2011) implemented a 10-step strategy to aid in this approach. Table 4 describes these 10 steps that a potential African American executive must achieve to be successful, arguably ensuring their way to the C-Suite of corporate America. In addition, Figure 2 is a graphic display of Pinkett et al.'s (2011) 10-step process. Pinkett et al.'s (2011) 10-step strategy roadmap is displayed as a series of steps on which an individual must embark to ensure a certain level of success by the time he or she reaches step 10. Interestingly, the 10th and final strategy of enlightenment/success focuses on community (giving back generously). It was interesting to anticipate learning how the CEOs in this study would define community and to what extent they equated it with their success. Overall, this 10-step process touches on most key elements of this study: identity and purpose, understanding diversity (old and new age), wisdom of others

(mentors), excellence (education and opportunity), and giving back generously (community).

Table 4

The 10-Step Strategy Roadmap in Table Format

Strategy 1 Strategy and Purpose	This strategy discusses the complexities and importance of establishing an identity. Cultural, gender, national, spiritual and religious, and professional identities are a part of this discovery. The purpose is “your reason for being” (p. 35) and examines one’s existence.
Strategy 2 Exposure	This strategy encompasses obtaining exposure, moving beyond one’s comfort zone, and becoming diversified. The authors stressed moving beyond one’s comfort zone by cultivating a greater appreciation of one’s self-worth and that of others, expanding an individual’s worldview, building cultural capital, and broadening one’s horizons. The diversity component of this strategy stresses reducing individual prejudices and fostering a sense of compassion for others.
Strategy 3 Excellence	This strategy requires discipline and the notion of empowering one’s own beliefs and “God-given” talents (p. 18).
Strategy 4 Diverse and Solid Relationships	This strategy stresses the importance of building diverse relationships throughout one’s career.
Strategy 5 Wisdom of Others	This strategy focuses on utilizing others’ wisdom to grow as a leader.
Strategy 6 Strength in Numbers	This strategy discusses the importance of strength in numbers by forming groups with like-minded people.
Strategy 7 Intrapreneurship	This strategy focuses on the effectiveness of networking, mentoring, and organizational involvement. Becoming an intrapreneur is one’s way of exerting power and influence as an organizational insider and helping the community.
Strategy 8 Entrepreneurship	This strategy allows an individual to have the wherewithal to establish his or her own company and organization.
Strategy 9 Synergy and Scale	This strategy discusses the importance of creating connections with people and organizations. These connections allow for the deepest impact with regard to relationships.
Strategy 10 Give Back Generously	This strategy discusses how being geGnerous with one’s time, talent, treasure, and touch throughout a career benefits others and establishes a greater sense of identity. This allows for legacy creation and evens the playing field for everyone.

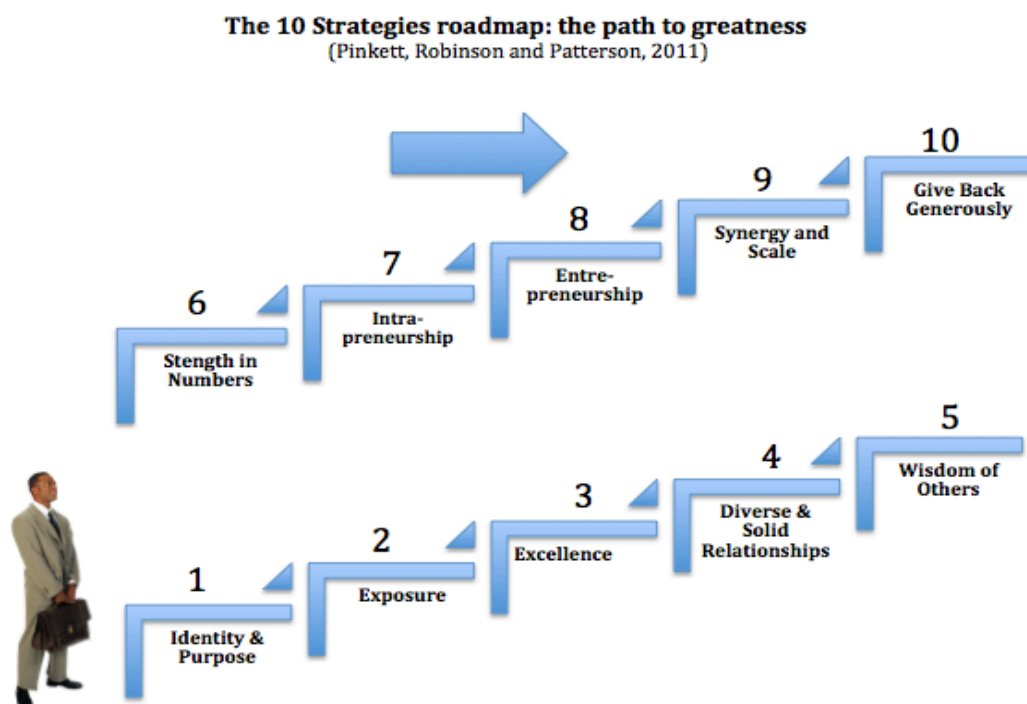


Figure 2. The 10-step strategy roadmap: The path to greatness

Conceptual Framework

Figure 3 below displays the conceptual framework of the study as a connected revolving image. I viewed the data collected in the study through each of the topical lenses.

Theorists for Conceptual Framework

Table 5 below displays a descriptive analysis of the conceptual framework with specific definitions and ideas provided by various theorists. I analyzed the findings of this study through the lenses of these theorists and created data codes as a result.



Figure 3. Circular graphic of the conceptual framework

Table 5

Conceptual Framework in Descriptive Form

<p>RQ1:</p> <p>What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?</p>	<p>RQ2:</p> <p>How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?</p> <p>2a. In what ways have racial/social climates impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?</p>	
<p>Leadership Definitions:</p> <p>1) Yukl (2006) Individual traits, behavior, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an executive position. 2) Pinkett, Robinson and Patterson (2011) 10 strategies of leadership</p>	<p>Diversity Definitions:</p> <p>1) Morrison (1992) Diversity is being viewed as nothing more than an appreciation of differences that improve organizational performances. 2) Maltbia and Power (2009) “A process or a set of actions that typify how an organization responds to diversity.”</p>	<p>Interview Questions regarding racial social climate.</p>
<p>Education:</p> <p>Judge, et al. (1995) CEOs have MBA’s and law degrees. Mentorship: Johnson Bailey and Cervero (2004) mentoring based on trust. The importance of cross-cultural mentoring and the strained relationship between blacks and whites.</p>	<p>Black Identity:</p> <p>1) Jackson and Wijeyesinghe (2012) black identity development model. 2) West (1993) Black leader must be a race-transcending prophet who critiques the powers that be. Fundamental social change for all who suffer from socially induced misery.</p>	<p>Experiential Learning:</p> <p>1) Kolb (1984) Continued reflection upon earlier experiences in order to add and transform them into deeper understanding. Kolb’s learning cycle.</p> <p>2) Yorks and Kasl (2002) experiential learning brings about reflective discourse, hence promoting the need to reflect on ones experience and translate that into ones organizational governance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornileus (2013) • Dubois (1986) • Grayman (2009) • Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012) • Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) • Judge, Cable, Boudrea, and Bretz (1995) • Kolb (1984) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maltbia and Power (2009) • Merriam-Webster (2015) • Morrison (1992) • Pinkett, Robinson and Patterson (2011) • Sealey-Ruiz (2011) • West (1993) • Yorks and Kasl (2002) *Yukl (2006) 	

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented leadership theories, the significance of mentoring in African American leadership, the evolving face of diversity in corporate America, racism, and the caveats of experiential learning. Although this chapter outlined crucial vignettes with celebrities, intellectuals, and a corporate leader's bouts with discrimination, it did not go into detail on the experiences of the CEOs in terms of workplace racism and its possible impediment to one's career trajectory. More specifically, how can one overcome these impediments and obtain a place in the C-Suite? The experiences of Winfrey, Gates, Jay-Z, Marshall, and Tyson suggested the intricacies of leading a corporation in their daily environments or their interactions with their board of directors.

I am well aware that Winfrey, Gates, and Jay-Z may have access to another layer of safeguards because of their fame. Nonetheless, there are impediments to reaching the C-Suite for all races, particularly the African American race because of their struggles throughout history. One may assume that only drive and self-confidence are needed; however, the research has indicated otherwise. There is a significant disparity in who occupies the CEO position as it relates to race, gender, guidance, and opportunity. Researchers have agreed that success in obtaining an executive position relies heavily on mentorship (Ates, 2003; Bacchus, 2004; Harper, 2013; Hayes, 2008; Mycroft, 2012). The question is: Who mentors or mentored the current and former CEOs in this study? Is it an assumption that mentors must look like mentee? Through personal interviews with former and current CEOs, this study investigated these questions to understand the relationship between mentor and mentee regarding racial relations.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences and leadership recommendations of current and former African American Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) at Fortune 500 companies. Chapter II presented literature on the leadership trajectory of African American CEOs, examined the meaning of diversity within their organizations, discussed the significance of mentorship, and provided insight into the organizational climate during the current heightened racial-social climate in America. These examinations may possibly facilitate providing a passageway for aspiring African Americans who seek to obtain a top-tier position (e.g., successor plan). A search using key words in ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the Gottesman Libraries at Teachers College, Columbia University revealed that no other research has yet addressed this specific focus. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
2. How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
 - 2a. In what ways have the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

Study Design

This research was a non-experimental qualitative data study based on participant narratives intended to provide information on the leadership trajectory and experiences of African American CEOs at Fortune 500 companies. The study includes biographical participant interviews and demographic data.

Overview of Research Design

Narrative research has multiple forms, utilizes a variety of analytical practices, and derives from different social and humanities disciplines (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Narrative is based on the lived stories of individuals' experiences as a method (Creswell, 2013). Czarniawska (2004) defined narratives that are lived and told as a specific type of qualitative design; that is, "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p. 17). According to Creswell (2013), narrative researchers collect stories from individuals about their experiences. These often result in stories told to the researcher by the participants as a way of conveying a message (Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008). The benefit of individuals/participants telling their stories in a narrative form is a revelation of how individuals view themselves. Etter-Lewis (1993) described oral narratives as "a dynamic interactive methodology that preserves an individual's own words and perspectives in a particularly authentic way" (p. xii). Narratives are viewed as an intimate expression and provide a bridge for the reader to understand the narrator (Johnson-Bailey, 1994).

Johnson-Bailey (1994) used a narrative analysis approach to tell the stories of African American females and their re-entry into the higher educational system. Her goal

was to display the sociocultural analysis of the collected data. Johnson-Bailey utilized an unstructured format, which allowed the participants to tell their stories, so to speak, and provided questions for them to answer. Etter-Lewis (1991, 1993) also used oral narratives of Black women professionals, which relied heavily on dialogue and later resulted in an uninterrupted autobiography (Johnson-Bailey, 1994). In West, Zuccarello, Scott, West, and de Goer (2007), Nod Miller wrote her autobiographical research about adult education and lifelong learning over a 20-year period. Miller viewed her autobiographical narrative as one of imagination, skills, metaphors, and multidisciplinary perspectives, which focused on understanding personal, psychological, and social experiences through life history narrative. West et al. (2007) elaborated on Marianne Horsdal's consideration that narratives provide a sense of self-therapy for the participant.

Figure 4 below displays the phases followed in the researcher's dissertation process. The significant segments in each phase are accentuated in larger blocks below the text in each phase (i.e., implement a research topic, schedule interviews, record and transcribe, etc.).

Discussion of Sample

As mentioned in Chapter I, there are only 16 current and former African American Fortune 500 CEOs. The aim of this research was to interview at least 10 participants; however, because of limited access (i.e., participant schedules and my limited connections), I was able to interview only five participants. I first identified the CEOs by searching the BlackEntrepreneurProfile.com and then cross-referenced it with the Executive Leadership Council. Finally, the participants were selected based on CEO status and confirmations. The Executive Leadership Council is an organization dedicated

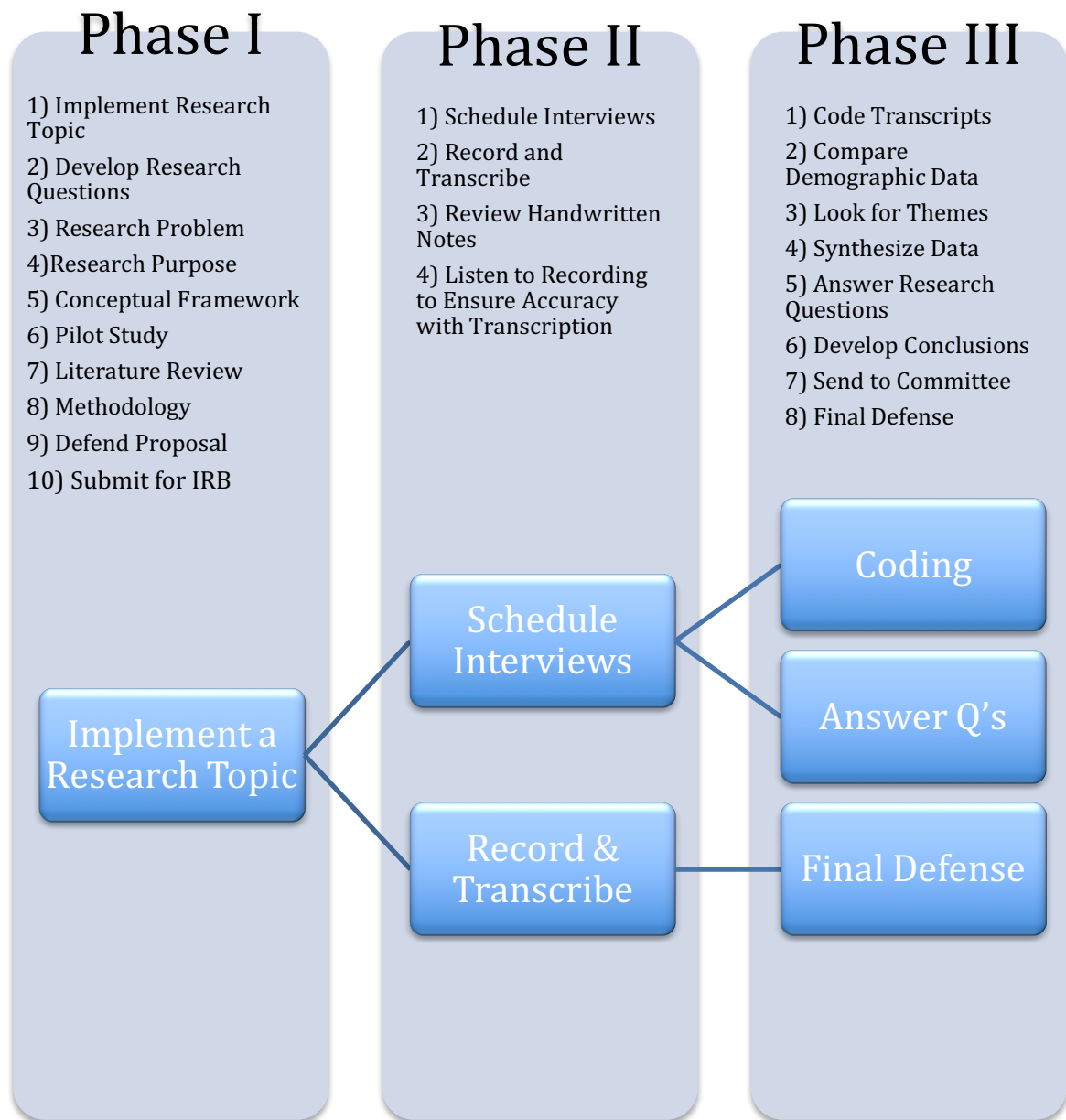


Figure 4. Researcher's study completion phases

to increasing the number of successful Black executives, domestically and internationally, by contributing to their development and philanthropy endeavors, thereby adding strength to their organizations and communities throughout their career (Executive Leadership Council, 2015). The goals of the organization are to: (a) increase the number of Black executives serving as CEO with at least one in each Fortune 500 company, and (b) increase the number of board seats held by the global Black executives at publicly traded companies. In addition to the Executive Leadership Council, I was first given access to a former CEO by way of a non-Fortune 500 retired CEO. Due to the former Fortune 500 CEO's schedule, he preferred to complete the questionnaire electronically. With my advisor's approval, the information was obtained in this way. The second former CEO was secured by my consistent calling to organizations and former boards of which the CEO was a part. Finally, after contacting several organizations, I received a phone call on my cell from the former CEO one Saturday morning. At that point, we scheduled an in-person interview months in advance in Manhattan. The third participant was obtained by the second CEO's referral. Despite the referral, however, I researched where the third CEO was located by again contacting several organizations. This interview was conducted in person in Manhattan. I obtained access to the fourth and fifth CEOs by contacting corporate boards and providing research informational emails to secure the interviews. This process took several months, which one had been postponed due to the CEOs' schedules. Both interviews were completed over the phone utilizing the Tape-A-Call mobile application.

Methods for Assuring Protection of Human Subjects

Precautions and measures were taken to protect the identities of the participants in this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym and the names of their companies are not mentioned. Because the participant sample was small, I took additional measures to safeguard against identifiers. I ensured all information obtained was strictly for my listening and viewing purposes. Instead of noting a participant's specific prior position and company, I provided a general description. Stringer (2007) argued that in planning a study, a researcher must take necessary precautions to alleviate any sense of harm to the participants while they take part in a study. Harper (2013) added that researchers should use informed consent, which typically includes statements indicating a participant's right to refuse to participate and the ability to withdraw at any time for any reason. I stored the printed data safely in a locked cabinet and placed the electronic data in a password-encrypted file only accessible to me to prevent any viewing by others. None of the data will be made public to others unless explicit and written consent is provided. Additionally, I alerted each participant to the possibility that someone may be able to identify them, given the small population size; nevertheless, every precaution was taken to avoid this possibility.

Methods for Data Collection

This study was based on participants' experiences revealed in a one-to-one interview format with a few prompting questions that facilitated answering the research questions (Creswell, 2013). In terms of protocol, I followed several steps from initial contact to data collection (see Table 6).

Table 6

Data Collection Procedure Steps

Procedure Steps	Procedure Description
Step 1	Contact the Executive Leadership Council “contact” to confirm the current list of Fortune 500 CEOs. When the “contact” provides the researcher with the expedited contact information to the CEOs, the researcher will proceed.
Step 2	Send an official email to the participants’ secretary.
Step 3	Schedule interview.
Step 4	Bring two digital recording devices for additional precaution. Introduce researcher to participant and explain the process.
Step 5	Listen to the participant’s story.
Step 6	Thank each participant for his/her time and let him/her know that he/she will be receiving a copy of the individual transcript for clarification.
Step 7	Transcribe interviews.
Step 8	Send a copy of the individual transcript to each participant for clarification purposes via email or special delivery (i.e., UPS, FedEx).
Step 9	Code each interview with the literature.

Creswell (2013) offered that narrative stories are gathered through many different forms of data collection. Moreover, the primary source of data collection is through interviews, followed by observations, documents, pictures, and other sources of qualitative data. He concluded that at the end of the data collection, the researcher shapes the data chronologically to tell a story.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Even before the data were collected, I began analysis with choices (Hayes, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the interviews were transcribed, I compared the responses with the literature review topics (i.e., mentoring, diversity, leadership, and experiential learning) and analyzed the data based on the participants’ demographic

information. Considering that this study was based on one-to-one interviews, the participants' experiences as a CEO of a Fortune 500 company were the central focus. Each participant's data were placed in multiple matrices that listed their demographics and responses to questions. For a closer look at the commonalities among the participants, I used NVIVO, Survey Monkey, Excel, and Word to uncover additional themes. Coding is an essential part of data analysis and synthesis. According to Creswell (2013), coding involves placing the text or visual data into categories of information, seeking evidence for the codes from sources in the study, and labeling the codes. Creswell suggested beginning with short codes, which he referred to as "lean coding" (p. 184). Lean coding consists of five to six categories with shorthand codes and labels. Creswell further stated that while one reviews the database, the categories may expand; however, he recommended not developing more than 25-30 categories of information. Given the small participant size, I began with 5-8 categories and as narratives were completed, I implemented additional categories.

Creswell (2013) also explained that individuals who end up with 100-200 categories struggle with reduction because most publications allow a maximum of five or six. He also advised against counting codes when analyzing data because this conveys a quantitative orientation, which is contrary to qualitative research. He encouraged qualitative researchers to look for code segments that describe and develop certain themes. Codes represent a variety of information but should focus on (a) the researcher's expectations of what one should find before the study; (b) unexpected findings by the researcher; and (c) conceptually interesting or unusual information. Creswell also discussed the significance of themes in a study, referring to them as the classification

of a family (i.e., children as themes and grandchildren as segments of data). Interpretation of the data, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), involved understanding the data or making sense of the lessons to be learned. Creswell (2013) offered a variety of approaches that enable the researcher to portray his or her research. He discussed the three-dimensional space approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which includes the three elements of data representation of research: namely, “interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places or the storyteller’s places)” (Creswell, 2013, p. 189).

Denzin (1989) further suggested that researchers should identify objectives and sets of experiences in a subject’s life when beginning a biographical analysis. During the interview, the researcher prompts the participants to expand on various sections of their life (Creswell, 2013). He concluded that meanings and theories are then extracted from the participants’ discussion about career models, procession of life course, models of biography, and natural history models. I was intrigued by Reissman’s (2008) suggestion of composing the stories of the participants as a typology of four analytic strategies reflecting diversity. Reissman explained that researchers analyze what is spoken or written during the time of data collection. During the representation of the data analysis, Creswell (2013) recommended that a narrative study should embody components of the representation. Table 7 displays this representational analysis by research approach (Creswell, 2013, pp. 190-191). To the left of the table, the data analysis and representation are displayed. The right column displays the research method (narrative).

Table 7

Data Analysis and Representation of a Narrative Study

Data Analysis and Representation	Narrative
Data organization	Create and organize data files
Reading, note taking (memoing)	Read thoroughly through texts, create margin notes. Form initial codes
Describing the data into codes and themes	Describe personal experiences through epoch and describe the essence of the phenomenon
Classifying the data into codes and themes	Develop significant statements and group statements into meaning units
Interpreting the data	Develop a textural description “what happened” Develop a structural description “how” the phenomenon was experienced Develop the “essence”
Representing, visualizing the data	Present narration focusing on processes, theories, and unique and general features of the life

The researcher found Creswell’s table beneficial in how it provided a step-by-step process of ensuring validity and reliability when analyzing and representing data. The interpretation of the data and answering the questions of “what happened” and “how” are tools to keep the researcher on track with data interpretation. It is my belief that large studies can often lead researchers in multiple directions if their interpretation is not focus-driven.

Validity/Reliability

Angen (2000) suggested two types of validation: ethical and substantive validation. Ethical validation questions the underlying moral assumptions of research

agendas, their political and ethical implications, and the ethical treatment of diverse voices. Essentially, the research should establish a “generative promise” (p. 389), heighten new possibilities, form emerging questions, and inspire new dialogue. Substantive validation is an understanding of one’s individual topic, its derivative from other sources, and documenting this process in a written study (Creswell, 2013). Creswell further stated that self-reflection contributes to the authenticity of someone’s work. Additionally, the researcher interacts with the participants to create the interpretations. Creswell concluded that the researcher gives substance to the inquiry by understanding that the research was derived from previous researchers. He posited several validation strategies; however, the most relevant that apply to this study are triangulation and clarification of researcher biases. Triangulation allows the researcher to make use of multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroboration. A clarification from the outset of the study is crucial so that the reader understands my position about any biases and/or assumptions that may impact the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988). With this study, the transcripts were provided to the participants for them to check for accuracy and credibility. Creswell argued that taking information back to participants for review of the transcribed data is an important step in ensuring validity in research.

Silverman (2005) and Creswell (2013) agreed that a tape recording’s transcription should indicate trivial yet crucial pauses and overlaps. Creswell added that computer programs can assist in coding and analyzing the data. He believed they are valuable for small databases but most helpful with 500 or more pages of text. Moreover, he

acknowledged the advantages and disadvantages of computer programs when analyzing data, and below is a brief description of each:

Advantages

- Computer programs provide the researcher with easy access to files and allow the researcher to store documents in one place.
- The need for elaborate color-coded systems with regard to themes and text is no longer needed.
- A computer program encourages the researcher to take a closer look at the data and clearly think about emerging themes.
- Concept mapping allows the researcher to visualize themes and code relationships based on the computer's ability to draw visual models.

Disadvantages

- A researcher must be well adept at learning the computer program.
- Computers can be an impediment to some researchers by putting a machine between the researcher and the actual data.
- Individuals may find that moving information around becomes less desirable and slows down the process.
- Many programs do not specify how to use the program geared towards a particular qualitative method (e.g., narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, etc.).

In consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing computer programs, I found it beneficial to cross-reference the information obtained using an old-fashioned approach (i.e., color-coded data by hand, re-reading transcriptions, and

underlining) in addition to computer software. These processes allowed for a more accurate analysis of the data and further ensured validity and reliability. I utilized NVIVO software, Excel, and Word to identify themes and correlations as a second measure during the analysis of this research. I found NVIVO and Word to be most useful.

Limitations

This study included participants who are in high demand with tremendous responsibilities. The former CEOs may not actively still work for a Fortune 500 but are highly sought-after consultants and live a life of public scrutiny. A second interview was not requested of the participants because of their schedules and the significant amount of time it took to receive responses. Due to the time constraints and the difficulty of accessing the participants, I was unable to further probe into their responses, which for some appeared to be scripted. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym for anonymity and confidentiality purposes. Stringer (2007) suggested it is virtually impossible to include all the people who must be included in an interview for extended periods of time. Harper (2013) argued that observation is limited with small groups of participants, which can make it difficult to generalize results. Furthermore, the analysis could prove that critical incidents with relations to race are isolated and do not apply to any of the CEOs at Fortune 500 companies.

Pilot

As a precursor to this study, a pilot study was conducted with two participants, one male and one female. One participant was a CEO of a well-known corporation and lived a controversial life in the public eye, while the other is still the CEO of an industry-

respected 501(c)3 organization. The interviews were both recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. Table 8 presents a sample of their responses to leadership trajectory, mentoring, meaning of diversity, giving back to the community, racism, challenges, and advice to aspiring African American CEOs (in and outside of their organizations). This table also includes emergent themes in terms of diversity and mentorship. Both participants listed “Black” when referring to diversity and incorporating it within their organizations as opposed to a differing of ideas. In terms of mentorship, Participant A suggested that mentors are not a part of one’s daily activity and for her symbolized a sentence or quote. During the interview, she referenced an individual earlier in her career that said, “Keep the media on your side so that it will be harder for the board to blindside you.” This stood as a mentorship quote throughout her career trajectory and there was no one individual who guided her with day-to-day decision making. Participant B stressed the significance of mentors and argued that their presence is crucial to an aspiring executive’s success. Participant A candidly discussed race throughout the interview, whereas Participant B appeared to avoid the issue and was somewhat reserved in his responses. When the researcher asked participant B about the racial challenges in the workplace, he spoke about “putting the right people in the right places” position-wise instead of the challenges of leading while Black. This could have been my assumption, but the responses led me to believe he was avoiding this question and preferred to focus on the non-racial challenges of the CEO position. Participant A was a former CEO of a well-known company who is now a consultant at a Manhattan firm. Participant B is an active CEO with a strenuous schedule. Surprising, the interview with participant A lasted

1 hour, 41 minutes, whereas the interview with participant B lasted 45 minutes. I had assumed that the current CEOs would be pressed for time, as previously mentioned.

Table 8

Pilot Study Responses

Topics	Participant A (Female)	Participant B (Male)
Leadership Trajectory	“I received my Bachelor’s and then went to Columbia University for my masters...I joined the board of the organization and then while searching for a new CEO one committee member suggested I take the position...other than that I did not have much experience as a CEO, it was mainly through my network.”	“Walked and talked like a CEO! Reading about the things that CEOs must have and the skills! Looked up things that would be helpful, asked questions, developed people, and managed up and down... I interviewed for four or five positions before...I went to business school.”
Mentoring	“It depends on what you consider a mentor...I don’t find that mentor is one who holds your hands and shows you the ins and outs. A mentor to me was a person who said one sentence that stuck with me.” “I do think it’s important to find people who are on your side and will show or say things to inspire you.”	“It is imperative to have mentors who are coaching you and there are so many unwritten rules. So many rules for that company. You don’t want to learn the hard way or not learn at all.” “A mentor is someone who is advising you how you should be doing things on a day-to-day basis on how to improve your management skills.”
Diversity meaning (Participant A) Incorporating Diversity (Participant B)	“This new age definition of diversity is not what it meant when I was CEO. It simply meant getting more people of color, Black at the time involved in decision making and hiring them for roles they were often looked over for.”	“There is a group called the Executive Leadership Council. Groups like that are important and their main goal is to increase more Blacks in the C-Suite. That’s where CEOs are plucked from when you are already in the C-Suite. You have to be one or two levels removed from the CEO.”
Community (Giving Back)	“It depends on how one defines community. Community can mean the area where you live or your church or activities. It does not necessarily depend on one’s race.”	“I don’t know if they are always asked but it’s an expectation. Black people are in different positions because we don’t generally have wealth to fall back on. We are more in a position of living off a current income.”
Racism (Participant A) Challenges (Participant B)	“I felt racism a number of times throughout my career and I would feel it from people when I would walk into the board room. I am woman so that was an additional layer I felt. There were people who were just out to get me because they did not want a woman of color in charge...there is a great deal of resentment when you perform.”	“Hiring is the most challenging job by putting the right people in the right places! Hiring the right people. I can’t make every decision and I have to have people I trust. I can’t handle every problem I need them to handle it.” “In terms of race, I don’t know any CEO who calls themselves a Black CEO, rather it’s a CEO who happens to be Black.”
Advice to Aspiring CEOs	“You are born with leadership (human) skills, it’s a certain set of traits...I knew it at a young age, you either have it or you don’t.” “I would say to aspiring to know what your passion is or what you are good at.”	“I’d say constantly look for ways to develop yourself and let people know you are receptive to feedback...ask what else could I do better.”

Timeline

Proposal Presentation: Mid-December 2015

IRB Submission/Approval: Mid-December 2015 to Mid-January 2016

Data Collection: December 2016-January 2018

Data Analysis and Results: January 2017 to the beginning of April 2018

Present Draft of Dissertation: Beginning of April 2018

Final Defense: April 26, 2018

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the small participant size and the sensitivity of topics being discussed in this study required a narrative qualitative approach. There are arguments for and against narrative biographies. A compelling argument in favor revealed that “narrative data are stories of lived experience told from a first-person point of view” (Rossiter, 2008, p. 422). Oral history (narratives) developed into a wider movement alongside feminism to provide a voice to those who became marginalized by dominant perspectives (West et al., 2007). West et al. argued against narratives since oral historians have debated the nature of one’s memory and truth in oral accounts, past and present interplay, and interpretational processes. I found that the most effective way to tell the stories of the participants was through the use of narration and demographics. This method allowed aspiring African American leaders to learn from the stories and trajectories of these participants from first-person accounts. Aside from teaching and learning, narratives are seen as a way of bringing people together (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Johnson-Bailey, 1994).

Chapter IV

FINDINGS: PATH TO THE CEO SUITE

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences and leadership recommendations of current and former African American Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies in an effort to benefit aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, Human Resource professionals, and White executives who work with and aim to incorporate more African American executives. Five former and current CEOs took part in this study. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were examined:

1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
2. How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
 - 2a. In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

The results of the data collection process are examined in this chapter. A demographic data questionnaire was used to gather Fortune 500 CEOs previous positional information, family upbringing, age range when the CEO position was acquired, and educational background, among a few other variables. An interview questionnaire was used to facilitate answering the research questions. This chapter offers

the first major finding accompanied by themes that were derived from the participants' responses to the interview questions—more specifically, their relation to the first research question.

Finding #1

All participants (100%) in this study agreed that a Fortune 500 CEOs leadership trajectory should encompass: leadership experience, educational degrees, institutions attended, mentorship, and perseverance. The following displays a snapshot of the themes that emerged from the first finding discussed in this chapter:

Finding #1

All participants (100%) in this study agreed that a Fortune 500 CEOs leadership trajectory should encompass: leadership experience, educational degrees and institutions attended, mentorship and perseverance.

Experience

- Prior leadership positions [Experiential Learning] (100%)
- Performance (20%, Michael)

Education

- Institutions attended (80%, Roman, Shelby, Frederick and Luther)
- Degrees (20%, Frederick)

Mentorship

- Traditional Mentors (40%, Shelby, Michael)
- Non-traditional (20%, Roman)
- Ownership of career (40%, Frederick, Luther)

Perseverance

- Persistence (40%, Roman, Shelby)
- Goal Setting (20%, Frederick)
- Avoid deterrence (20%, Michael)

Demographic Data

Essentially, the researcher was able to interview five participants out of the total 16 African American CEOs in the history of the Fortune 500, 31% of the relatively small population. Additionally, the researcher was able to interview two out of the four current African American CEOs, 50%. From the five participants, 100% were male.

Figure 5 displays the demographic data questionnaire results to ethnicity. All five (100%) of the participants identified as being Black/African American.

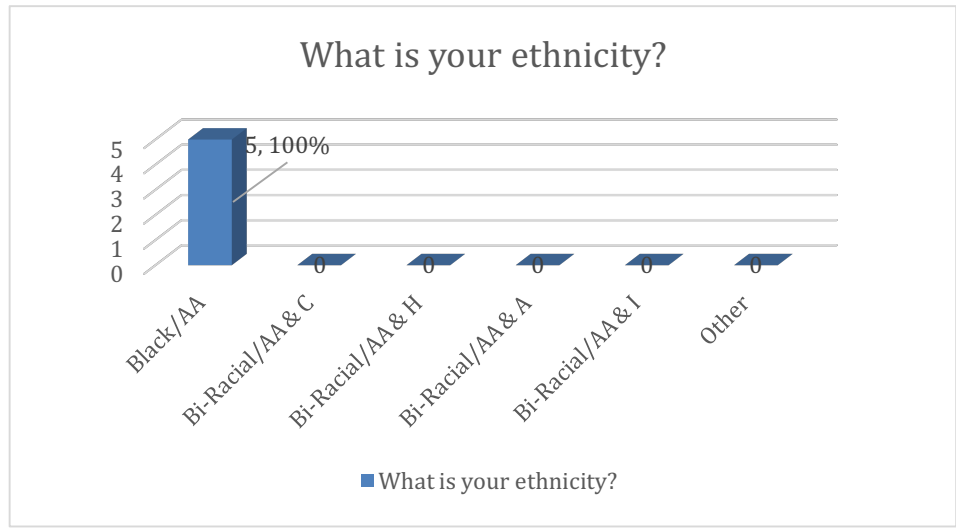


Figure 5. Ethnicity of participants

Figure 6 displays the results to the question of whether the participants were first-generation college students. Three of the participants were not first-generation college students and two were.

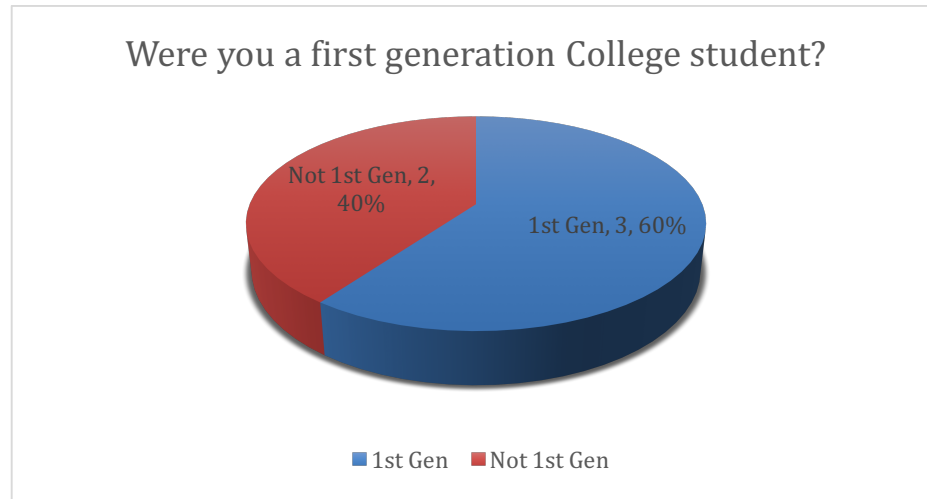


Figure 6. Participants' responses to first-generation college student

Figure 7 displays the results to the question of whether or not participants were raised in a single-parent household. All of the participants 100% lived with both parents (mother and father).

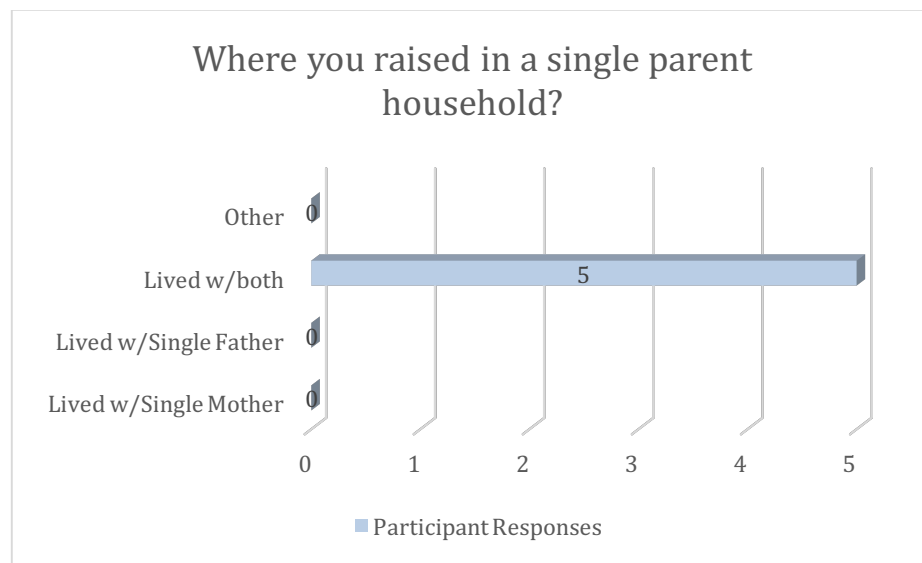


Figure 7. Participants' responses to single-parent household

Table 9 displays the participants' position before acquiring the Fortune 500 CEO position. Each participant had different positions before becoming a CEO, but for confidentiality purposes, I am unable to provide the series of positions held by each CEO due to the small number of Fortune 500 CEOs.

Table 9

Participants' Positions Before Acquiring Fortune 500 CEO Position

Participant	Former Position
Roman	Higher Education Executive
Shelby	President and Chief Operating Officer
Frederick	Executive Vice President
Luther	Executive Committee Head of Financial Corporation
Michael	Organizational President

Table 10 below reports the participants' age range when they acquired the CEO position. For confidentiality purposes the age ranges will be reported without a specific match to the CEOs listed in the previous figure. The age range of the participants began as early as 46 to the eldest at 60.

Table 10

Participants' Age Range When Acquiring CEO Position

Age When Appointed CEO	Average Age Range
46	53
60	
53	
50	
57	

Figure 8 displays the participants' political party affiliation. Two identified as Democratic voters, one identified as a Republican, one identified as an Independent, and one identified as a Democratic and an Independent voter.

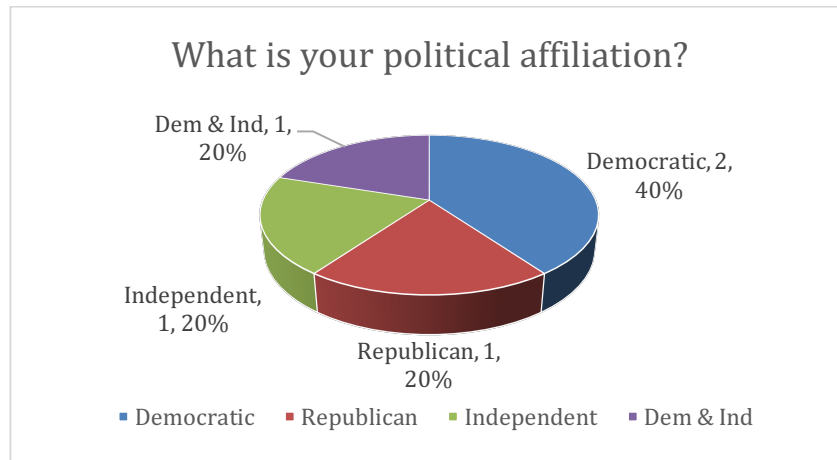


Figure 8. Participants' political party affiliation

Figure 9 displays the participants' religious affiliations. One CEO identified as a person with multiple religious faiths, primarily from the Southeast Asia region. Two CEOs identified as Christians, one did not identify with any religion, and one other identified as Episcopalian.

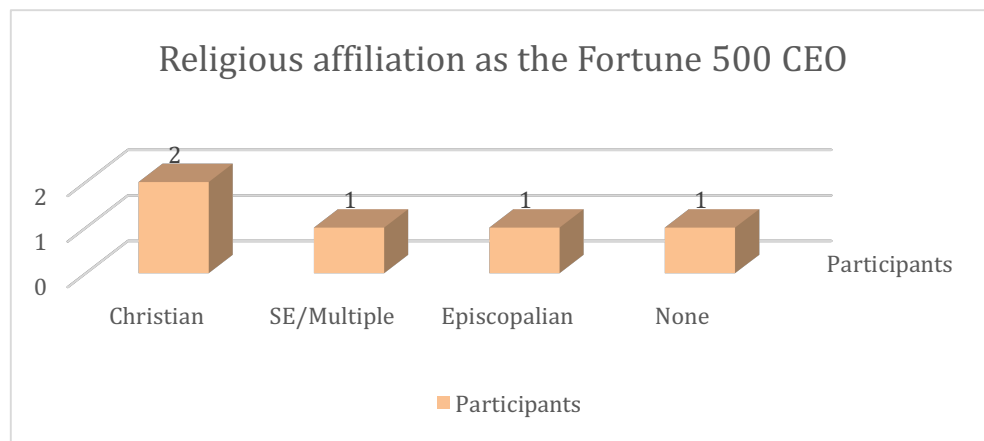


Figure 9. Participants' religious affiliations

Figure 10 displays the relationship status of the CEOs upon their appointments.

All participants (100%) responded that they were married.

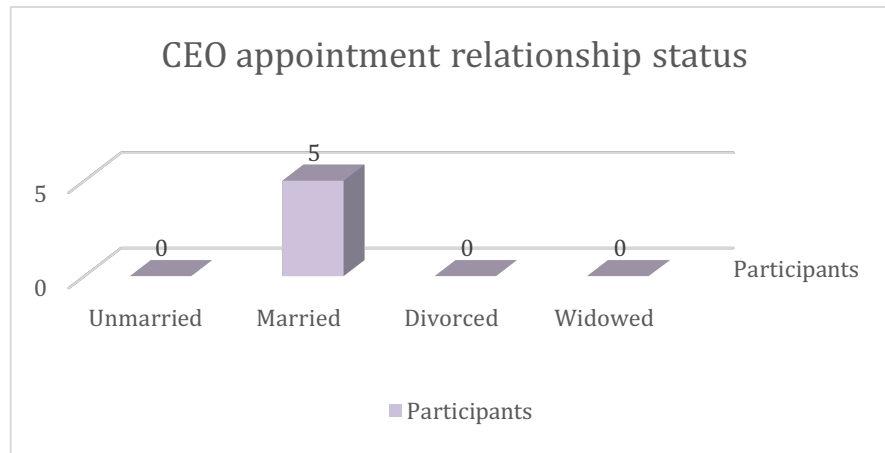


Figure 10. Participants' relationship status

Table 11 displays the hours each CEO worked per week on average. One participant worked between 60-75 hours weekly; two worked 50-60 hours weekly, not including special engagements; one worked 70 hours per week; and the last one worked 65 hours per week, or as he put it, “6½ days for 10 hours a day.” The average hours worked per week by the CEOs in this study totaled 66 hours on a high-end estimate and 59 hours on a low-end estimate.

Table 11

Participants' Hours Worked Per Week

Participant	Hours Worked Per Week	Average Hours Per Week
Roman	50-60	66 hours (High end) [60+75+70+65+60=330/5]
Shelby	60-75	
Frederick	70	
Luther	65	59 hours (Low end) [50+60+70+65+50=295/5]
Michael	50-60	

Figure 11 below displays the participants' highest educational level obtained upon accepting the CEO position. Two participants had a Juris doctorate (JD), one had a doctorate (PHD), one had a Master's degree (MBA), and one had dual terminating degrees—a doctorate and a Juris doctorate.

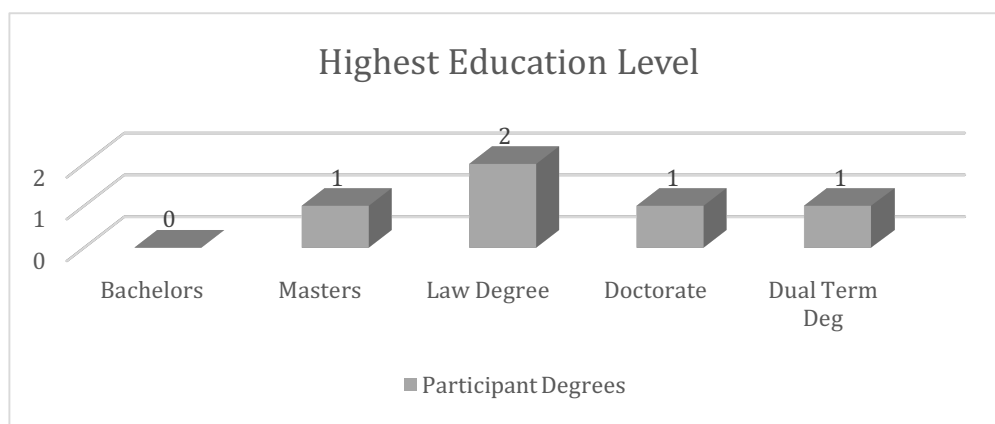


Figure 11. Participants' highest education level

Figure 12 below displays the overall analysis of the demographic data of the CEO participants. The demographics of the CEOs who participated in this study were first-generation college students, raised in two-parent households, who had an executive role in the C-Suite before advancing to CEO, were approximately 53 years of age, aligned with the Democratic party, identified with Christianity as their religion, were married to the opposite sex, worked an average of 66 hours per week on the high end and 59 hours per week on the low end, and had a graduate degree (law being the highest tally).

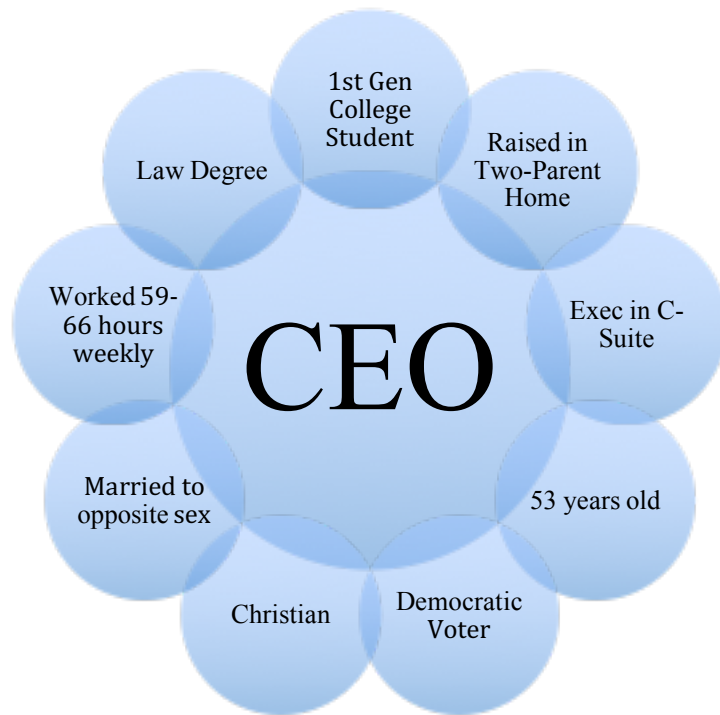


Figure 12. Overall analysis of demographic data of CEO participants

The following is a vignette of each CEO's mini-biography along with personal responses to the interview questions. The first finding, as mentioned previously in this chapter, was derived from the participants' responses to the following interview questions:

1. What were the critical steps and experiences that enabled you to obtain the CEO position (career trajectory)?
 - Institutions attended
 - Importance of mentors
 - Previous experience
 - Critical incidents (i.e., racism, stereotype challenges)
2. How do you define leadership?
3. What recommendations would you give an aspiring African American CEO given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite?

4. How important is it to be mentored as an inspiring CEO? Does ethnicity play a role in mentoring?

In an effort to do justice to the CEOs' recommendations, views on mentorship, and critical incidents that propelled them to reach the pinnacle of Fortune 500 companies, I considered it important to provide their direct quotes in many of these vignettes. In summarizing people who rarely give interviews due in large part to access, I found that their direct quotes were authentic and provided direct strategies for aspiring CEOs. Justice would not have been done with any form of summarization or paraphrasing for many of the responses in this study. I attempted to summarize a majority of the quotes, but felt that readers would find such a summary vague and would prefer to read the direct responses and distinct viewpoints of the African American CEOs themselves.

Roman: Former CEO

Roman spent the majority of his childhood living abroad. He is bilingual and identified as African American. He was raised in a two-parent household and is not a first-generation college student. Both of his parents achieved higher education, and Roman attended an Ivy League institution for his undergraduate education and a prestigious school for his graduate degree. Roman was interviewed in person and we spoke for well over 1½ hours. Before obtaining the CEO position at a Fortune 500 company at age 60, he served as an executive in the higher education arena. He has had multiple career changes and has been arguably successful within each spectrum. Roman affiliates with the Democratic party and considers himself as being part of multiple religions. When he accepted the CEO position, he was married and had a doctorate degree from a prestigious institution. He worked over 50 hours a week in his position.

Critical Steps and Experiences

When asked “What were the critical steps and experiences that enabled you to obtain the CEO position?” Roman’s response alluded to his many different experiences with leadership and the prior positions he held within the government, on corporate boards, and at higher educational institutions. Roman was also adamant about the skills he had required over the years as well as his ambition. He reflected on the era in which he grew up and the constant views of inadequacy that were placed on African Americans.

When I discussed his motivation to reach the C-Suite, Roman responded:

I was determined to give the lie to the incompetence of Blacks, the White supremacist do everything they can to maintain the image of stupidity, incompetence, every negative characteristic you can think of. Look, I did it because I wanted to show that in each of these areas, I could exceed. I could excel...there are thousands and thousands of us...I did this but I’m not the only one.

Mentoring

Roman’s definition of mentors was described in the nontraditional sense as he discussed previous employers and their impact on his learning. His definition of mentors included previous employers: “I had persons for whom I worked who were tremendously helpful to me...to me. [A mentor] is an individual who recognizes your talent and ability and does what he or she can to help you improve.” Roman went on to discuss the many different individuals who approached him to be their mentor. In his view, a mentorship is earned and not given upon request. He indicated that mentoring is not something one asks anyone to do just because of positionality. He provided a rationale for his response to aspiring leaders who seek him out for mentorship: “A, I don’t work with you. B, I’m not

seeing you all the time. Well, I want to become a board member. I said, you don't do it that way.... I keep saying earn the mentorship. Earn it.”

Leadership Definition

I then asked Roman how he defined leadership and if he believed he was born a leader. Roman described himself as a person who cares about human beings, especially when it comes to leadership. Even when people he worked with publicly criticized his leadership methods, he understood where they were coming from on a human level. Roman did not mention a list of attributes that define what a leader is, but instead mentioned how to identify when someone is a “good” leader and when someone has missed the mark, so to speak. He discussed what he referred to as the great guru syndrome:

If you want to see the worst of bad leadership, it's Trump. I had never been in a place where I haven't had at least two people, sometimes three who would say to me, “That's a terrible idea.” They can't be the great guru [leaders]. And one of the biggest mistakes that CEOs make is they think this way—I call this the syndrome.

Recommendations to Aspiring CEOs

I proceeded to ask what recommendations Roman would give an aspiring African American CEO, given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite. Roman indicated that aspiring CEOs should not be deterred by numbers and push forward to achieve their intended outcome. He discussed the political climate and the issue of change becoming obsolete as the corporate world goes backwards. More specifically, his recommendation to an aspiring CEO was persistence: “It's like people say, well, Obama was elected president, no more racism. You know what I mean, so the issue is really persistence and really working at it and not just saying it's done.” Roman

stressed that there are obstacles ahead and many people will try to negate one's ability and power. His advice was to "push forward."

Shelby: Former CEO

Shelby was raised in a two-parent household and is not a first-generation college student. Some of his family members achieved some degree of higher education. Shelby attended a conventional undergraduate state institution and a private graduate institution. He was an extremely busy consultant and former 500 CEO at the time of this interview, so he agreed to participate as long as he could submit his questionnaire responses electronically. Given the difficulty in obtaining access to Fortune 500 CEOs, I agreed upon receiving my dissertation advisor's permission. Although I am grateful for Shelby's participation in the study, the responses appeared concise without opportunity for further inquiry.

Before obtaining the CEO position at a Fortune 500 company at age 53, Shelby served as a president and chief operating officer of a company. He affiliates with the Republican party and considered himself non-religious at the time of his CEO appointment. Upon accepting the CEO position, he was married and had earned a Juris doctorate degree. He worked between 60-75 hours per week in his position.

Critical Steps and Experiences

When asked what were the critical steps and experiences that enabled him to obtain the CEO position, Shelby said he believed that his early schooling up until his prior CEO position prepared him for the role. He described his most critical event as

being a college student with the knowledge that he could survive on his own and learn to make tough decisions while enlisted in the military.

Mentoring

Shelby referred to mentorship as an “important ingredient in anyone’s rise to power.” He added that we all stand on someone else’s shoulders, especially when it comes to career advancement. He was adamant that mentors help aspiring executives overcome obstacles that stand between them and their goals. Shelby mentioned the relevance of ethnicity; however, his view was that “ethnicity is not dispositive to almost anything.”

Leadership Definition

Shelby defined leadership in his questionnaire as “The ability to visualize or conceive of an end goal and to persuade (inspire) others to follow and work with you on the journey to attain that goal.” His view on leadership was more traditional in the sense that he mentioned goal setting while also discussing alignment with truth tellers in a leader’s inner circle.

Recommendations to Aspiring CEOs

The next question adding to the first finding was what recommendations would he give to an aspiring African American CEO, given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite. Shelby responded, “I would give him or her the same advice I give anyone trying to achieve and advance: Knock the spots off the job you are currently doing. Success begets success.” His response was similar to his definition of leadership in that it indicates the importance of goal setting.

Frederick: Current CEO

Frederick was raised in a two-parent household with a fervent religious upbringing and is a first-generation college student. He attended a traditional undergraduate institution and prestigious graduate school. Frederick's interview was conducted via phone, given his geographic location and schedule. Before obtaining the CEO position at a Fortune 500 company at age 50, he served as a C-Suite executive at another company. Frederick identifies as an Independent voter and considers himself a lifelong Christian with strong religious values both now and at the time of his CEO appointment. When accepting the CEO position, he was married and had obtained a Master's degree in Business Administration. He works approximately 70 hours per week in his position.

Critical Steps and Experiences

When asked what were the critical steps and experiences that enabled him to obtain the CEO position, Frederick related his success to the number of management positions he had held prior to becoming CEO. He listed his knowledge in multiple functional areas such as risk management, supply chain, operations, and logistics. His experience with different competencies in multiple areas allowed him to have a well-rounded perspective on what a leader, in his opinion, should know. He also equated his success with his MBA degree. Frederick then discussed his experience with racial undertones that may very well come from innocent questions by colleagues, friends, and aspirers: "I tend to answer the traditional questions like, how does it feel like to be one of only three Black Fortune 500 CEOs, and I would say those are fair and typical

questions.” He concluded that other than the occasional question, there has been no critical incidents thus far.

Mentoring

In terms of mentorship, Frederick believed that ethnicity does not play a role in mentoring. He discussed the skill sets that aspiring executives need to elevate their careers. Frederick mentioned the importance of mentorship, but also felt it was often overstated. He believed strongly in one’s personal responsibility when it came to career goals:

I think mentoring is important but it shouldn’t be overstated, because at the end of the day you own your career. And I’ve said this many times to young aspiring executives, you can’t put your career trajectory in anyone’s hands, not in your mentor, not in your human resource department, you have to own it.

Frederick further discussed that often times overemphasizing mentoring is used to distract one’s mistakes and lack of mastering skill sets.

Leadership Definition

Frederick then went on to share about his views of leadership and mentioned the importance of executing a plan along with inspiring and motivating employees. He defined leadership as “the ability to clearly state a vision, to articulate the operational plan, to achieve the vision, to staff and recruit the team to execute the plan, and then inspire and motivate the workforce.” He was confident that all of these methods contribute to the development of a successful leader.

Recommendations to Aspiring CEOs

When I asked Frederick what recommendations he would give to an aspiring African American CEO, given that 2% of corporate America is African American in

terms of the C-Suite, Frederick mentioned the significance of setting achievable goals with mapped-out timelines and discussed the importance of establishing goals that fall between a 3- and 5-year perspective. His belief was that setting one's goals helps with one's career destination. Frederick also expressed the dangers of taking jobs that may provide higher salaries but interrupt the career path: "If your destination is undefined, you tend to wander around by taking jobs that may pay a little more or may have a fancier title, but they may not lead you in the right career position." Frederick explained that one should have more than one career goal to allow aspiring CEOs different experiences in order to learn as much as possible about their enterprise. Frederick noted the importance of knowing other colleagues' jobs in an organization to better grasp their positionality:

I had the opportunity to work in different function areas in retail, which gives me a unique perspective, because I've been to so many different areas, I have an understanding of how it all connects to the core business. The third thing is always learn. Find ways to spend time with colleagues in other areas so you can have a perspective on what lens they're looking at the business through, because you want to be a CEO, you want to understand what your information technology person views as critical, important factors. You want to understand what your chief financial officer sees as critical, your supply chain person, your e-commerce person, so spend time with those colleagues early in your career just so you can build a database of knowledge and always learn and always try to better yourself.

Luther: Current CEO

Luther was raised in a two-parent household and is not a first-generation college student. He attended an Ivy League institution for his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Luther's interview was conducted via phone per his preference. Before obtaining the CEO position at a Fortune 500 company at age 57, he served as an international C-Suite executive at another company. Luther identified as a Democratic voter and affiliates with the Episcopalian religion. When he accepted the CEO position, he was

married and had obtained two doctoral degrees (academic and legal). Luther works approximately 65 hours per week in his position.

Critical Steps and Experiences

When asked what were the critical steps and experiences that enabled him to obtain the CEO position, Luther's response was "Previous experience and then institutions attended." His response is in line with what Roman, Shelby, and Frederick had stressed about experience.

Mentoring

Luther's description of mentoring was poignant and requires his own voice:

Mentoring is always important but I don't think it was mentors that got me to this job directly. Something that people often forget, is if you want someone to mentor you, it's not good enough just to go and attempt to build that relationship. It actually has to be a relationship and that means that you as a protégé have to do your part to listen and to execute well and frankly to be successful because no one wants to mentor someone who tends to stumble from failure to failure. Mentoring takes up some time, takes some energy, takes some thought. Consequently, it's perceived as an investment and most people want a return on their investment. And so, you know, I think mentoring is important for an aspiring CEO, as you say, or even for a [current] CEO. But the flip side of that is the mentor expects the protégé to also be successful and reflects some glory back on to the protégé... that's not a negative, selfish comment. It's just the reality of life given the time it takes you want a return on the effort that you're putting into it.

Leadership Definition

Luther's definition of leadership resonated with the notion that a leader must excite his or her followers. He explained that effective leadership cannot be obtained if someone looks over his or her shoulder and no one is following. He went on to explain that leadership consists of a set of attributes and skills comprised of expertise, vision, empathy, and fortitude:

Expertise is the way a product or process or market works. Vision has to be articulated in an exciting and appealing way where it is that you want these folks to go, you know. Empathy is important because most folks want someone who understands the human condition. They must understand that sometimes family intrudes, team dynamics are not ideal and perhaps sometimes you're suspicious of your colleagues. Fortitude is the last part of this because if you want people to follow you, you have to recognize that sometimes the path is a bit more challenging.

Recommendations to Aspiring CEOs

I asked Luther what recommendations he would give an aspiring African American CEO, given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite. Luther's response was thorough in how he offered several components in his answer: not being afraid of deterrence, figuring out a skill set, and closing the gap between demonstrated skills and what people perceive are necessary for the CEO role. Luther specifically mentioned the first African American Fortune 500 CEO and how he set the tone for aspiring CEOs: "Don't be deterred by the fact that to date the number is small. It would be even smaller if each one of us were just deterred. There would be no one to follow Cliff Wharton."

Luther went on to discuss the overemphasis on networking and advised potential CEOs to tread lightly in this area:

I think I would advise people to downplay something that I think has become maybe heavily, overly focused on which is, you know, networking and connections. There's nothing wrong with networking. There's nothing wrong with having connections. You don't get far without them. But networking and connections are no substitute for persistently demonstrating the skills that are widely perceived to be necessary to be a successful CEO.

When I pointed out the strong influence on networking, Luther responded, "It's not that networking is irrelevant, but it's necessary and far from sufficient and there's no substitute for a persistent and consistent track record of success."

Michael: Former CEO and Multiple Fortune 500 Executive Board Member

Michael was raised in a two-parent religious household and is a first-generation college student. He attended prestigious institutions for his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Michael's interview was conducted in person and lasted for 50 minutes. Before serving on his first Fortune 500 board and obtaining a CEO position at ages 37 and 46, respectively, he served as an organizational C-Suite executive at various companies. Michael identified as a democratic voter and affiliates with the Christian religion. When he accepted the CEO position, he was married and had obtained a Juris doctorate degree. He worked approximately 60 hours per week in his position.

Critical Steps and Experiences

When asked what were the critical steps and experiences that enabled him to obtain the CEO position, Michael's response was:

Schools don't matter anymore the performance does. I think schools may matter in terms of you know, alumni who have contacts that somebody from Prairie View University would not have. There are people who can perform but they don't have leadership qualities. I do not know of any male or female CEO who were selected because they were Black or female I do not know of any situation where that was done. It was all on merit.

Michael further expressed the selection process as a Fortune 500 board member:

What you have to keep in mind about White people is that the dollar is very important and at American Express we did not appoint Ken Chenault, chairman and CEO because he was Black, we appointed him because he was the best of the bunch inside and outside, it was all quality. The same thing was true of Ursula Burns, the same thing was true of the current CEO at J.C. Penney, because they want return on their investment, they want profits, they want their company to be a great company and that's the basis on which CEOs have been selected. Now, I do know of some situations where they wanted a Black because they thought a Black would help out the situation, but even then they had to be qualified.

Mentoring

Michael then discussed his views on mentoring:

Mentoring! Well, I think it's very important, in fact I want to write a book about mentoring and I have no doubt that to the extent that I have achieved anything.... I did not get here by myself. I had great counseling, great teaching and people who would call me in and say, "You're doing this wrong, do you think you are" "I could not have gotten this far in life without mentors who were pushing and pulling and pushing and pulling who said "You can do that," I want to write about it. We had a program at the BLANK where we would encourage professors at Black colleges to come to IBM and other companies and work for the summer so that they could understand how the corporation worked, how it did its business, so when they went back to school they became a part of that teaching and a part of that counseling.

Leadership Definition

Michael was then asked what his definition of leadership entailed. He stated that he originally agreed with Vernon Jordan's view on leadership in the autobiography *Vernon Can Read*: "A leader of an interracial organization must walk a fine line. If he or she is Black leaning too far in one direction risks the charge of being called an Uncle Tom or Aunt Sally by Blacks within the group and those who are outside observers. If one goes in the other direction, one risks being labeled insensitive or ungrateful by Whites" (Jordan, 2001, p. 229). Michael stated:

I agreed but I believe this has changed, the era of tokenism is over and I think white people have come to understand that. And so people are not now recruited to make sure that the quota is right, they're now recruited to really help run the company...people have very substantive jobs, it has nothing to do with being Black.

Michael went on to offer leadership as an attribute: "There are people who can perform but they don't have leadership qualities."

Recommendations to Aspiring CEOs

When asked what recommendations he would give an aspiring African American CEO, given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite, Michael's response indicated his affection for his mother and his strong family upbringing:

Hard work, commitment to excellence. I'm guided by my mother's wisdom, she used to say, "Just tend to your own garden, son, tend to your own garden." So I finally said, "What do you mean, 'tend to your own garden'?" She said, "If you don't tend to your own garden and you spend time worrying about your neighbor's garden, you can't afford to look up to check out your neighbor's garden, because the moment you look up that's when the bull weevil is going to get in yours." So you just keep your eyes on the prize.

Chapter Summary

The findings chapter presented demographic data to display a snapshot of the participants in this study, along with vignettes reflecting the participants' backgrounds and personal views on their leadership trajectory or their journey to the Fortune 500 CEO role. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, there are 16 African American CEOs in the history of the Fortune 500, and I was able to secure five Fortune 500 CEO interviews who met the criteria for this study. Each participant revealed information in his interview that led to the development of critical attributes that may serve as a guide for aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, HR professionals, and White executives who work with and aim to incorporate more African American executives. For this chapter, the focus was on participants' responses to the interview questions that aligned with Research Question 1: *What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African*

American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory? The themes derived from the participants' answers to the interview questions to support or negate the research question were: experience, education, mentorship, and perseverance.

In terms of critical steps and experiences that enabled CEOs to obtain their positions, all of the participants (100%) agreed that prior *experience* in leadership positions was pertinent to obtaining the CEO position. Michael argued that performance was a component of one's experience before attempting to acquire a Fortune 500 position.

All five participants (100%) agreed that *education* was an important factor in the makeup of a Fortune 500 CEO. Four (80%) of the participants agreed that the institutions they attended contributed to the development of a Fortune 500 CEO. One (20%) participant, Frederick, felt as though his MBA degree helped prepare him for his CEO role.

Two (40%) participants equated *mentorship* with a traditional sense. Michael posited, "I could not have gotten this far in life without mentors who were pushing and pulling and pushing and pulling who said, 'You can do that I want to write about it.'" One (20%) participant, Roman, described mentorship in the nontraditional sense by declaring, "I would not ever say I had mentors in the traditional sense of what people talk about nowadays. I had persons for whom I worked who were tremendously helpful to me." The two remaining participants, Frederick and Luther, agreed on the importance of mentorship but argued that mentors are not a substitute for one's career ownership.

Finally, two (40%) participants, Roman and Shelby, mentioned *persistence* as a caveat to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO. One participant, Frederick, discussed the

importance of goal setting, more specifically stating, “I think you need to have goals that fall between the 3- and 5-year perspective, career goals. If you can set those goals and you set them effectively, it helps you to make the right career decisions on getting to the destination.” On the other hand, one participant, Michael, was adamant about avoiding deterrence. During the interview, he expressed his concern with individuals/potential CEOs on the correct path to the C-Suite who somehow lose their way because of distractions.

Table 12 displays the themes derived from the findings in this chapter along with the order of the theme development. It provides an overall analysis of the Fortune 500 CEOs along with their responses to the interview questions that contributed to the first finding. Table 13 presents the participants’ responses to the interview questions that led to a greater understanding of Research Question 1

The next Findings chapter discusses the Research Question 2 and the findings that supported or negated it.

Table 12

Research Question 1, Finding 1, and Themes

Research Question 1	What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
Interview Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the critical steps and experiences that enabled you to obtain the CEO position (career trajectory)? • How do you define leadership? • What recommendations would you give an aspiring African American CEO, given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite? • How important is it to be mentored as an inspiring CEO? Does ethnicity play a role in mentoring?
Finding	All participants (100%) in this study agreed that a Fortune 500 CEO leadership trajectory should encompass: leadership experience, educational degrees and institutions attended, mentorship, and perseverance.
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience (Prior Leadership Positions [Experiential Learning]) • Education (Institutions Attended and Degrees) • Mentorship (Traditional/Nontraditional and Ownership of Career) • Perseverance (Persistence, Goal Setting, and Avoid Deterrence) •

Table 13

Participants' Responses to Interview Questions in Relation to Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?

Interview Question #1	Interview Question #2
<p>What were the critical steps and experiences that enabled you to obtain the CEO position (career trajectory)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions attended • Importance of mentors • Previous experience • Critical incidents (i.e., racism, stereotype challenges)] 	<p>How do you define leadership?</p>
<p>Roman: “I was determined to give the lie to the incompetence of Blacks..., I did it because I wanted to show that in each of these areas, I could exceed.”</p>	<p>Roman: “If you want to see the worst of bad leadership, it’s Trump. I had never been in a place where I haven’t had at least two people, sometimes three who would say to me, “That’s a terrible idea.”</p>
<p>Shelby: “Shelby believes that his early schooling up until his prior CEO position prepared him for the role.”</p>	<p>Shelby: “The ability to visualize or conceive of an end goal and to persuade (inspire) others to follow and work with you on the journey to attain that goal.”</p>
<p>Frederick: “Frederick related his success to the amount of management positions he held prior to becoming CEO. He also equates his success to his MBA degree.”</p>	<p>Frederick: “The ability to clearly state a vision, to articulate the operational plan, to achieve the vision, to staff and recruit the team to execute the plan, and then inspire and motivate the workforce.”</p>
<p>Luther: “Previous experience and then institutions attended.”</p>	<p>Luther: “A set of attributes and skills comprised of expertise, vision, empathy and fortitude.”</p>
<p>Michael: “Schools don’t matter anymore the performance does... they want return on their investment, they want profits, they want their company to be a great company and that’s the basis on which CEOs have been selected.”</p>	<p>Michael: “There are people who can perform but they don’t have leadership qualities (attributes).”</p>

Table 13 (continued)

Interview Question #3	Interview Question #4
What recommendations would you give an aspiring African American CEO given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite?	How important is it to be mentored as an inspiring CEO? Does ethnicity play a role in mentoring?
Roman: “persistence and really working at it and not just saying it’s done	Roman: I had persons for whom I worked who were tremendously helpful to me...to me (Mentoring) it is an individual who recognizes your talent and ability and does what he or she can to help you improve
Shelby: Knock the spots off the job you are currently doing. Success begets success. Importance of goal setting.	Shelby: Mentorship is an, “important ingredient in anyone’s rise to power.” He added that we all stand on someone else’s shoulders especially when it comes to career advancement. “Ethnicity is not dispositive to almost anything.”
Frederick: If your destination is undefined, you tend to wander around by taking jobs that may pay a little more or may have a fancier title, but they may not lead you in the right career position. Establishing goals.	Frederick: “Mentoring is important but it shouldn’t be overstated, because at the end of the day you own your career.” Frederick believes that ethnicity and mentoring do not a play a role.
Luther: Not being afraid of deterrence, figuring out a skill set and to close the gap between demonstrated skills and what people perceive are necessary for the CEO role.	Luther: “Mentoring is always important but I don’t think it was mentors that got me to this job directly. “A mentor expects the protégé to also be successful and reflects some glory back on to the protégé...”
Michael: Hard work, commitment to excellence. Keep your eyes on the prize.	Michael: Mentoring! Well, I think it’s very important, in fact I want to write a book about mentoring and I have no doubt that to the extent that I have achieved anything.... I did not get here by myself. Michael discussed mentoring programs with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Chapter V

FINDINGS: NAVIGATING DIVERSITY AND THE RACIAL-SOCIAL CLIMATE

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences and leadership recommendations of current and former African American Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies in an effort to benefit aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, Human Resource professionals, and White executives who work with and aim to increase African American executives. Five former/current CEOs took part in this study. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
2. How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
 - 2a. In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

Chapter IV focused on the first finding: All participants (100%) in this study agreed that a Fortune 500 CEOs leadership trajectory should encompass leadership experience, education, mentorship, and perseverance. This chapter now discusses the second finding to relation to Research Question 2.

Finding #2

All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to incorporating it.

Finding #2a

The majority (60%) of the participants believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect. The following is a summary of the themes that emerged from the findings discussed in this chapter.

Finding #2

All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to incorporating it.

Definition

- Intrinsic (Skills, competencies, political affiliation, sexual orientation, experiences) 80%, Roman, Shelby, Frederick and Luther
- Extrinsic (Ethnicity, gender and age) 80%, Shelby, Frederick, Luther and Michael

Methods

- Active (Hiring practices, mentoring, summer programs, internships) 60% Shelby, Frederick and Michael
- Passive (values, focus on results) 40% Roman and Luther

Findings #2a

The majority (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect.

Action

- Communicative (town hall company meetings, educating colleagues, and company internal statements) 60% Shelby, Frederick and Luther
- Uncommunicative (no comment) 40%, Roman and Michael

As with Chapter IV, the information below is a summative analysis incorporating direct quotes from the CEOs' responses to the interview questions.

Roman

Diversity

In addressing the evolving term *diversity*, I presented to Roman the research by Maltbia and Power (2009) that diversity can be defined as how an organization responds to diversity based on processes and actions. Before answering the question "In your own words, what does diversity mean and how do/did you incorporate diversity in your organization?" Roman began to laugh. He discussed his dissatisfaction with labels and the mystery of organizations substituting "process for outcomes." He provided a warning that diversity cannot be the end-all/be-all answer to organizational talent. Roman compared diversity implementation with organizational assessments:

...it's almost as bad as human resource people who believe firmly in 360 evaluations. You know what that is. Where you get your boss to evaluate you and your peers to evaluate you. Oh, God, I'm like—then they have a system where you always have to fire at least 20% of your population every year.

As the interview progressed, Roman circled back to diversity and discussed one of his prior positions at a different organization:

Ten percent of every department's budget at the beginning had to be used for the purposes of increasing salaries of women. Okay. See? Now, does that—am I saying therefore a woman's president? No, no, I'm the president who's trying to do the best for everybody involved, okay? I wasn't the Black president or the tall president or the skinny president, no. It's not one thing. You can't just do one thing.... It's got nothing to do with race, you're not going to survive. You have to have a broad range of skills and competencies that meet the needs of the situation at that time.

Racial-Social Era

When asked how has this current racial-social era (i.e., Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, Black Lives Matter, law enforcement and Black community tensions, presidential election, etc.) impacted the corporate climate, Roman made sure to point out that he does not comment on his successors because of the optics: “I could be an absolute jerk making comments because I really don’t know. And to me it sounds like a cop-out but it isn’t... It’s not that I don’t care, it’s just I’m not in charge. I don’t know.” He went on to discuss the period of his CEO tenure and how times change so readily. He was adamant that he was not a chicken for answering the question and repeated “no comment” several times.

Shelby

Diversity

In answer to the question on diversity in the organization, Shelby described diversity as a collection of different people, ranging from skill set to varying perspectives. He reflected on his experience as a CEO, which set the gold standard for diversity in his organization:

When I was CEO of the BLANK organization, I mandated that managers develop diverse states of candidates to use in hiring (stopping short of mandating quotas) and I employed special recruiters, who came from the various communities we served, to help managers find diverse candidates.

Racial-Social Era

When asked how this current racial-social era impacted the corporate climate, Shelby stressed the importance of the era and its impact on the corporate climate, particularly if it is a business that prides itself on its values and consumer opinion:

The question has been overtaken by the phenomenon of the Trump Administration. I think, if I were still CEO of BLANK, it would be my responsibility to make sure that all of my employees understood the core values of our organization and adhered to them. This would likely mean more town hall-type meetings and more direct communication from me to all employees and more town hall-type meetings at the various divisions of the company.

Frederick

Diversity

Responding to the question on incorporating diversity in his organization, Frederick first defined diversity as being “twofold” in that ethnicity and gender plays a large part in how one defines it. Given the distinct passionate nature of the response he provided, I am choosing to present it in its entirety below:

For me diversity is really twofold, obviously, as a Black person growing up with ethnicity playing a huge role in my life I look at diversity from a gender and ethnicity perspective, and I think it’s important, because I want to have people in the room that bring different life experiences that you can’t learn academically. You can’t learn academically how to be a female, you can’t learn academically how to be Hispanic or how to be a single mom or how to be Indian, Asian, or African American. And so bringing those things to the table just from a pure gender and ethnicity standpoint is one way I look at diversity. The other way I look at diversity is just diversity of skill set and diversity of age. As we specifically in XXX lean more into social media and digital technology, the diversity of generations matter, because I want people who haven’t just read about Instagram and YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, that people actually use it, leverage it and then understand it. So I look at it from gender ethnicity, but also from age and also from experiences.

Racial-Social Era

Regarding how this current racial-social era has impacted his corporate climate, Frederick pointed out that the corporate environment is “overwhelmingly less ethnically diverse,” which is not typically reflective of ethnic employees’ communities. Frederick repeatedly stated that it was his responsibility as the CEO to educate his less diverse

colleagues. He discussed the current climate and the culture clash that has in a sense invaded our society.

I've taken the responsibility to help to educate my management team who may be more non-diverse on kind of what all this means, because if you're just watching the news and you're looking at some of the things that are happening in some of the cultural clashes that we're having along the lines that you talked about, people can look at it and not understand the context in which it exists because it's foreign to them. It's almost like listening to something happening in another country...it's important not only for me but for my management team to understand as much as they can about all of our customers all of our associate populations, because they are watching the same media and in some cases, they are the individuals that are reflected in the media. And so as a Black man I take the responsibility of trying to educate my team on these things and take the tough questions that they will have a limited opportunity to ask someone else, because they may not have someone else in their network that looks like me.

Luther

Diversity

When considering diversity and how he has incorporated it into his organization, Luther identified it as encompassing differences based on physical, gender, and political views for an "obvious" definition. He then described the "modern world's" view as encompassing sexual orientation which he posited was not included three generations ago. Luther takes pride in his organization because, as he stated, it includes all levels of diversity:

For us diversity is just really part of the core value of who we are because we believe that we will make better decisions if we have actively brought forward diversity and all of the types I just talked about.

Racial-Social Era

Regarding the current racial-social era's impact on his corporate climate, Luther's comments were similar to Frederick's in that they both agreed on the era's effect on the organization's climate:

Look. No company that I know of is completely isolated from the broader environment including, you know, the racial angle that you've talked about, but there are others as well. And, you know, I think it affects corporations in different ways, depending on who the corporation is. The riots that occurred in Charlotte had an impact on the people in my company who work there. I think it was called HB2, the LGBT transgender bathroom law that was passed in North Carolina had an impact on the corporate climate because it affected many people in different ways.

Luther went on to state that if a company is a consumer goods organization, the racial-social climate may affect what consumers are capable of doing. He also discussed the varying degrees in which a CEO should respond to the climate:

In my case, around some of these topics either I or my chief human resources officer put out a statement, you know, of empathy, not taking sides but understanding the stresses that people might be under. It may also be appropriate to, in some cases, address it very quietly, so, you know, talking to political leaders about what they're doing in a community in which you are a large employer might be important. So, you know, there are many different ways to address it. There's also the more public way that people address it, by signing petitions and signing open letters, that kind of thing. I've chosen not to do that, but that's just—it's not because it's not the right thing to do. It's because it's not—I thought it's not the way that I could have the kind of impact that I was hoping to have or would like to have on behalf of my company on some of these topics.

Michael

Diversity

Considering how to define diversity and how it was incorporated into his organization, Michael relied on the notion that many companies have “worked this out pretty well” and have results to show for it. He believed that organizations have become more diverse. Although he neglected to define diversity, he reflected on his first board meeting where he was the only African American in the room:

I remember my first board meeting, I knew that two members of the board had voted against me, because they thought the time was not right. [Incorporating diversity] Mentoring, summer programs, internships, all of that's helpful, all of it.

Michael then discussed how he incorporated diversity at an organization he spearheaded to include minorities:

We had a program at the XXX where we would encourage professors at Black colleges to come to IBM and other companies and work for the summer so that they could understand how the corporation worked, how it did its business, so when they went back to school they became a part of that teaching and a part of that counseling.

Racial-Social Era

In commenting on how the racial-social era of today has impacted his corporate climate, Michael offered a perception that was significantly different from those of Frederick and Luther because he disagreed on its impact on the corporate climate:

No, the companies they have a focus. And that focus is not always concerned with what's going on in the community, they're trying to hire people who're going to do what the company wants to do. So it's seldom that you see corporate executives speak into an issue like what happened in Missouri and that kind of stuff. On the other hand, you just witnessed how corporations reacted to Trump after Charlottesville led by Ken Frazier and he quit and then other guys, "I'm out of here too." That's a tad unusual in the sense that business people try to stay with their business. But this was something that they could not stay away from. And a lot of people followed suit it was kind of a good thing.

After discussing the racial-social era, Michael specifically wanted to send a message to young Black aspiring executives and board members:

I also used to worry about young Black people who initially begin in a company and they get there one day and they're looking for a promotion the next, just keep your head down and do your work. That's worked for me. And most of the successful people that I know it's worked for them, attending to their own business. Secondly, some Black directors go in a board and as soon as they are there they want to report on affirmative action. Well, I think you got to get to a board and you got to see how the board operates. Who is the one voice that the board listens to, who is the one voice that the board does not listen to. You know all that before you start putting pressure.

Table 14 displays the participants' responses to the interview questions that aided in the development of themes for the second finding for Research Questions 2 and 2a.

Table 14

Participants' Responses to Interview Questions in Relation to Research Questions 2 and 2a

Research Question 2: How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?

Research Question 2a: In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

Interview Question for Research Question 2	Interview Question for Research Question 2a
In your own words, what does diversity mean and how do/did you incorporate diversity in your organization,	How has this current racial-social era (i.e., Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, Black Lives Matter, law enforcement and black community tensions, presidential election, etc.) impacted your corporate climate?
Roman: He discussed his dissatisfaction with labels and the mystery of organizations substituting "process for outcomes." He provided a warning in that diversity cannot be the end all be all answer to organizational talent	Roman: "I could be an absolute jerk making comments because I really don't know. And to me it sounds like a cop-out but it isn't.... It's not that I don't care, it's just I'm not in charge. I don't know."
Shelby: Shelby described diversity as a collection of different people, ranging from skill set to varying perspectives. "I employed special recruiters, who came from the various communities we served, to help managers find diverse candidates."	Shelby: "...if I were still CEO.... This would likely mean more town hall-type meetings and more direct communication from me to all employees and more town hall-type meetings at the various divisions of the company."
Frederick: "...as a Black person growing up with ethnicity playing a huge role in my life I look at diversity from a gender and ethnicity perspective.... The other way I look at diversity is just diversity of skill set and diversity of age. As we specifically in XXX lean more into social media and digital technology, the diversity of generations matter."	Frederick: "...as a Black man I take the responsibility of trying to educate my team on these things and take the tough questions that they will have a limited opportunity to ask someone else"

Table 14 (continued)

<p>Luther: Luther identified diversity as encompassing differences based on physical, gender, and political views as an “obvious” definition. He then described the “modern world’s” view as encompassing sexual orientation which he posits was not included three generations ago. For us diversity is just really part of the core value of who we are because we believe that we will make better decisions</p>	<p>Luther: “The riots that occurred in Charlotte had an impact on the people in my company who work there. I think it was called HB2, the LGBT transgender bathroom law.” In my case, around some of these topics either I or my chief human resources officer put out a statement, you know, of empathy, not taking sides but understanding the stresses that people might be under.”</p>
<p>Michael: Neglected to define but added, “Mentoring, summer programs, internships, all of that’s helpful, all of it.” We had a program at the XXX where we would encourage professors at black colleges to come to IBM and other companies and work for the summer so that they could understand how the corporation worked</p>	<p>Michael: No, the companies they have a focus. And that focus is not always concerned with what’s going on in the community, they’re trying to hire people who’re going to do what the company wants to do.</p>

Chapter Summary

This findings chapter provided support for Findings 2 and 2a. All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to incorporating it. The majority (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect.

Similar to the previous findings in Chapter IV, this chapter outlined participants’ responses to the research questionnaire. For this chapter, the focus was on participants’ responses to the interview questions that aligned with Research Question 2: *How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?* and Research Question 2a: *In what ways have racial-social climate impacted how they navigated*

diversity as CEOs? The themes derived from the interview questions to support or negate the research questions were definition, methods, and action.

In terms of critical steps and experiences that enabled CEOs to obtain their positions, all of the participants (100%) agreed that prior experience in leadership positions was pertinent to obtaining the CEO position. Michael argued that performance needs to be a component of one's experience before one can attempt to acquire a Fortune 500 position. Shelby, Frederick, and Michael (60%) agreed that hiring practices, mentoring, summer programs, and internships were active ways to display diversity. Roman and Luther (40%) provided a passive approach: focusing more on an individual's results aspect of diversity and mentioning the term as a part of the corporation's values.

In terms of *action*, Shelby, Frederick, and Luther preferred the communicative approach by offering suggestions such as town hall meetings, educating colleagues, and providing internal statements in this racial-social climate. Roman and Michael (40%) preferred an uncommunicative approach by offering close to "no comment." Michael mentioned that a CEO should focus on the task at hand and not get involved in racial-social issues.

Table 15 summarizes the themes that emerged from the findings in answer to the second research questions.

The next chapter focuses on the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of these findings.

Table 15

Research Questions 2 and 2a, Finding 2, and Themes

Research Question #2	How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
Interview Questions	In your own words, what does diversity mean and how do/did you incorporate diversity in your organization
Finding	All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to incorporating it.
Themes	Definition (Intrinsic and extrinsic) Methods (Active and Passive)
Research Question #2a	In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?
Interview Questions	How has this current racial-social era (i.e., Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, black lives matter, law enforcement and black community tensions, presidential election, etc.) impacted your corporate climate?
Finding	The majority of the participants (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect.
Themes	Action (Communicative and uncommunicative)

Chapter VI

ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND SYNTHESIS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences and leadership recommendations of current and former African American Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies in an effort to benefit aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, Human Resource professionals, and White executives who work with and aim to incorporate more African American executives. Five former/current CEOs took part in this study. The following research questions were examined:

1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
2. How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
 - 2a. In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

Findings

The major findings that emerged from this research study /were:

1. All participants (100%) in this study identified with and recommended that a Fortune 500 CEOs leadership trajectory include: leadership experience

(experiential learning), educational degrees, institutions attended, mentorship, and perseverance.

2. All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to incorporating it.
- 2a. The majority of the participants (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect.

This chapter presents my analysis by providing information via the demographic data and personal narratives of the five current and former Fortune 500 African American CEOs who participated in the study. After a careful examination of the study, the following themes emerged as a result of the findings:

1. experience, education, mentorship, and perseverance are successful CEO attributes;
2. terms and methods in diversity practices were defined; and
3. action was taken to confront the racial/social climate.

Analysis of Finding #1

The analysis provides a breakdown of the themes that emerged from the findings in this study. The findings in Chapters IV and V presented the data from an objective lens, based on participants' demographic data and responses to survey questions. This chapter now presents an analysis and interpretation of the data, allowing me to provide a subjective view of the findings based on the current literature.

Analytic Category 1

Research question 1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?

The responses from the interview questions indicated that all participants (100%) agreed that a Fortune 500 CEO leadership trajectory should encompass leadership experience, educational degrees, and institutions attended, along with mentorship and perseverance. The interview questions that contributed to answering Research Question 1 are as follows:

1. What were the critical steps and experiences that enabled you to obtain the CEO position (career trajectory)?
 - Institutions attended
 - Importance of mentors
 - Previous experience
 - Critical incidents (i.e., racism, stereotype challenges)
2. How do you define leadership?
3. What recommendations would you give an aspiring African American CEO given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the C-Suite?
4. How important is it to be mentored as an inspiring CEO? Does ethnicity play a role in mentoring?

All participants (100%) believed that prior leadership positions more specifically in the corporate arena had a significant impact on their leadership trajectory. How a future CEO performed in those positions was what Michael (20%) felt was a defining moment. In terms of education, 80% of the participants believed that educational institutions played a role in their path to the CEO suite, while 20% believed degrees mattered. Two of the participants received degrees from Ivy League institutions, two

received degrees from prestigious institutions, and one attended a private state institution. In terms of mentorship, 40% of the participants agreed in the “traditional” term of mentors. According to *Merriam-Webster* (2018), a mentor is defined as “a mentor who, because he is detached and disinterested, can hold up a mirror to us” (para. 1). This differed in the eyes of the participants who viewed mentoring in a nontraditional sense; however, mentoring was viewed as a crucial part of their success. Perseverance consisted of persistence, goal setting, and avoiding deterrence. Forty percent of the participants agreed that persistence was how they achieved what they did in terms of lateral movements within the corporate space.

Analytic Category 2

Research questions 2 and 2a. To facilitate answering Research Question 2, participants were asked: How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations? In what ways has the racial-social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs? Similar to Research Question 1, several themes emerged as a result of the participants’ responses to the interview questions. The following interview questions were used as a basis for answering the research questions:

2. In your own words, what does diversity mean and how do/did you incorporate diversity in your organization?
- 2a. How has this current racial-social era (i.e., Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, Black Lives Matter, law enforcement and Black community tensions, presidential election, etc.) impacted your corporate climate?

The responses from the interview questions contributed to the findings for these research questions, as discussed next.

Analysis of Finding #2

All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to enacting it.

Finding #2a

The majority of the participants (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect.

The themes that emerged from the participant responses were definition, methods, and action. Based on the responses, the participants categorized definition as intrinsic and extrinsic in terms of how they aligned themselves with diversity. Intrinsic was based on skills, competencies, political affiliation, sexual orientation, and experiences. Extrinsic included ethnicity, gender, and age. The participants discussed the methods by which they incorporated diversity into their organizations. Sixty percent (Shelby, Frederick, and Michael) claimed they chose a more active approach when it came to incorporating diversity. These methods were done by way of their hiring practices, mentoring, summer programs, and internships. Roman and Luther (40%) opted for what could be considered a passive approach to incorporating diversity, which consisted of focusing on values and performance. The performance portion relates to the previous and current job performance of potential CEOs or executives within their organization.

To facilitate in answering Research Question 2a, participants were asked: How has this current racial-social era (i.e., Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, Black Lives Matter, law enforcement and Black community tensions, presidential

election, etc.) impacted your corporate climate? The majority of participants (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no impact. I identified action as one of the themes that emerged from the participants' responses. Action was categorized as communicative and uncommunicative. Shelby, Frederick, and Luther (60%) recommended town hall company meetings, educating colleagues proactively, and preparing company statements to be distributed internally. Roman and Michael (40%) believed it was not appropriate to comment on external matters outside of the organization. As Michael put it, "the companies, they have a focus. And that focus is not always concerned with what's going on in the community." Michael's response tended to be in line with many corporate slogans when the bottom line is referenced.

Summary of Analysis

To begin the process of evaluating the responses to the interview questions, I searched for repeated themes, and four emerged from Research Question 1 while three emerged from Research /Questions 2 and 2a. Each category was then tallied to a percentage to recognize each participant's viewpoint and experience. All of the CEOs mentioned prior leadership experience (experiential learning) as a defining factor in one becoming a Fortune 500 CEO. Interestingly, when it came to the education theme, institutions attended received 80% of the participants' agreement in terms of significance. Michael, on the other hand, mentioned schools not mattering in the makeup of a CEO, with the exception of the alumni. This may be partially due to Michael being primarily a Fortune 500 corporate board member, whereas the other participants are or were Fortune 500 CEOs. In terms of mentorship, the participants appeared to be split on how they

viewed the term. Traditional mentors and ownership were mentioned more often than nontraditional mentors, as previously discussed in this chapter. Perseverance was mentioned by the participants when it came to culminating in their success. Persistence, goal setting, and avoiding deterrence were all factors that created their perseverance, the notion of keeping one's eyes on the prize and not losing focus. When it came to the actionable pieces of the research which entail leveraging diversity and taking actions regarding the racial-social era, the participants varied in their responses. Based on their responses, I found their derived views useful with categorizing their ideals.

Interpretation

The analytic section now leads to the interpretation of the findings, allowing me to provide first-hand discernment based on the participants' interview responses. The lens with which the participants aligned their CEO obtainment and navigated within that space will provide deeper understanding for all readers.

Analytic Category 1

Leadership experience, educational degrees, institutions attended, mentorship, and perseverance are needed to become a Fortune 500 CEO.

Further examination of this analytic category pointed out that participants equated prior experiences with opportunities that allowed them room to grow. Understanding the makeup of organizations and not being afraid to step outside of one's comfort zone in the corporate environment reached consensus among the participants. They took pride in their "hard work" and repeatedly used the word "demonstrate" when it came to being noticed for career advancement. The participants also discussed their bouts with being

overlooked for positions they thought they should have acquired but remained hopeful. They all received a terminal degree (i.e., MBA, JD, PHD), demonstrating the importance of acquiring institutional knowledge. Except for one participant (who attended a well-known HBCU), the rest attended predominantly White institutions for their undergraduate and graduate studies. Attending these institutions and developing the foundation for their future career helped them to navigate within the predominantly White corporate space. Throughout his interview, Michael discussed the significance of mentorship and how he would like to write a book on the topic. The majority of participants felt that many mentors came along the way in many different forms. Mentorship was not the end-all/be-all for the participants in that they differed on how to define the term. Ethnicity did not play a role in who they considered to be mentors, primarily because many of them were often the only African American in the pathway to the C-Suite. When the participants acquired the C-Suite, their focus was on “getting the job done,” being less concerned with outside distractions and employee satisfaction, understanding how corporate boards work, and satisfying shareholders. The drive to succeed without any barriers (distractions) served as the basis for their obtainment.

Analytic Category 2

They leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach to incorporating it.

This analytic category focused on how the participants leveraged diversity within their organizations based on their definitions of the term. The methods by which they incorporated diversity varied among the participants. Several viewed diversity as collective differences based on thoughts, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality to one's

political affiliation. This was split in terms of how the term was defined. Roman referred to diversity as a semantics term: “to-may-to vs. to-mah-to.” While he felt it was important in terms of salary increases for women, his view was that every CEO should look for the best and greater good of the organization. The action that the participants took in incorporating diversity into their organization seemed to be based on their viewpoints. There were those who demonstrated diversity within their hiring practices and those who considered the option but decided it was best to focus on “other things” within the organization.

The participants all came from two-parent households, in which two of them were also first-generation college students. The first-generation college students (Frederick and Michael) were proactive in their approach when it came to diversity within their organizations. Frederick was vocal with his staff and discussed his experiences from a Black male perspective, and Michael initiated mentoring partnership programs with HBCUs to help Blacks immerse in the corporate space. Whether being first-generation college students had something to do with their proactive approach to leveraging diversity within their organizations is open for debate. Given that there have only been 16 African American Fortune 500 CEOs at the time this study was conducted and all of them were often the only Blacks within their collective C-suites, leveraging diversity would appear to be of the utmost importance. When Roman stated, “I did it because I wanted to show that in each of these areas, I could exceed. I could excel...there are thousands and thousands of us....I did this but I’m not the only one,” many may assume that this would be an African American CEO’s priority once he obtained the position; however, the ways in which diversity is leveraged differs, which is similar to Maltbia

and Powers' (2009) definition of diversity and how an organization responds to diversity. In this case, the organization head (CEO) could possibly be the defining factor.

Analytic Category 2a

The racial-social climate has to some degree impacted ways in which a CEO navigates diversity.

The participants in this study were mixed when it came to navigating diversity in the current racial-social climate. There was a consensus that each were aware of the climate in terms of racial relations but were more concerned with how it affected their shareholders. Even though the participants acknowledged the racial-social climate; the killings of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, the emergence of Black Lives Matter, and the political divisiveness in America, only two of them referred to the issues listed in the interview questionnaire by name. For example, Luther mentioned the issues with the transgender “bathroom bill” and how the uprising of that moment affected his employees in the South Carolina region. Michael mentioned his dissatisfaction with the “Dream Act” and how the president’s leadership (Trump) is lacking with this regard. Although Michael has a history of instituting mentorship programs for aspiring African Americans, it was Frederick who mentioned the term “as a Black man” when he referenced speaking to his management team. Frederick was adamant about his religious faith and doing right by others. Michael was also born in a religious household and attended church every Sunday as a child. His religious faith is also an important part of his life currently. Michael later discussed his attention to the bottom line of the organization and not being bogged down so to speak with outside distractions. In part, this could be due to the

generations in which Michael and Frederick grew up with. Michael being well over 30 years Fredrick's senior.

In summary, the differences the participants had regarding this analytic category appeared to be contingent on current and former CEO status. Current CEOs (Frederick and Luther) were proactive in their approaches by issuing internal statements and conversing with their management team. They are essentially leading in the current environment and encountering their management team and employees on a daily basis. The former CEOs (Roman, Shelby, and Michael) did not display proactive responses when it came to addressing the racial-social climate. This may be a result of them no longer being in the CEO position. Shelby is the only one of the former CEOs who mentioned this strategy for addressing the current racial-social climate, which was to implement "town hall meetings" for management and employees.

Summary of Interpretation

I attempted to explain the responses from the participants in relation to their experiences, recommendations to aspiring CEOs, ways in which they leveraged diversity within their organizations, and how the racial-social climate has impacted their diversity leveraging. The majority of the responses were similar in that the participants by and large attended Ivy league and prestigious institutions for their education. All came from two-parent households. Eighty-percent identified as being religious upon their CEO appointment, which appeared to have some degree of influence on how they viewed their career trajectory. The similarities among the CEOs' appointments were traditional in that the majority came from positions already within the corporate C-Suite, whether it was within or outside of their companies. One CEO's appointment was nontraditional in that

he was offered a position after serving in an educational executive capacity. All of the participants mentioned their positive outlook on life and the “hard work” and dedication it took to become an inspiring CEO. The consensus among their responses seemed to be that one needs to look forward and equip oneself with the necessary tools.

Summary of Analysis and Interpretation

This study examined the CEO leadership trajectory, specifically how CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations and how the effects of the current racial-social climate has impacted diversity in their organizations. The findings revealed that the leadership experience (experiential learning), educational degrees, institutions attended, mentorship, perseverance, leveraging diversity, and ways of approaching the racial-social era were essential in a successful CEO’s tenure. Given that the participants were among the first African Americans to be CEOs of their companies, one can assume that most of their learning was experiential. No blueprint was established or available for them to follow how an African American Fortune 500 CEO is supposed to lead. The induction manual was in fact obsolete when it came to leveraging diversity and being the “only one” at the top. The participants stressed the importance of hard work and understood the history of their organizations. Many of the participants considered themselves the “best candidates” for their prospective positions. Michael, a highly sought-after board member and former CEO, adamantly stated that he did not know of any CEO who was appointed because he was Black—the appointment was all based on merit. Michael believed in the notion that the key to success for a Black executive is to “just keep your head down and do your work. That worked for me.” This appeared to be the consensus for 80% of the participants, except for Frederick who believed that his voice was important as the CEO

and he was not persuaded to keep his head down on issues. Frederick was the youngest CEO of the five participants, which may have much to do with his strategy. In general, the participants relied heavily on their strategic approach when it came to leading an organization and identifying the qualifications necessary for obtaining that position.

Revisiting Assumptions

Chapter I discussed four assumptions I held before conducting this study. The first assumption was that the participants would be guarded for the initial part of the interview because of their lack of trust of the world “outside” the organization. This assumption was proven correct by three of the participants. Roman insisted that he provide his own recording device along with my taping device during the interview because of his past negative experiences with researchers and reporters. Shelby made sure to type his responses to the interview questions and send them to me via email. This may have been due to time constraints, but the assumption also lay with a comfortability factor. To further support this assumption, before conducting the interview, Luther asked who would have access to my recording material and how would I mask the identities of the participants. Although I provided the confidentiality paperwork to Luther in advance, his concerns with confidentiality consumed several minutes of discussion and assurance.

The second assumption I had was that it would be difficult for participants to discuss sensitive topics such as race and their definitions of (the Black) community. This assumption was partially true, but also partially false. The participants discussed race in terms of how race was not a factor in their success, but they failed to address race when asked about the current racial-social climate and police killings of unarmed Black men

and women. Race was discussed on a limited scale. With regard to the Black community, participants varied in their responses and referred to community as a place where one lives without specifically identifying with obligations to the Black community. By and large, the participants discussed race and community but not to the extent I had expected.

The third assumption was that the CEOs would adhere to their scheduled interview times and be truthful with all responses. The assumption of the interview times was mostly true, except for one participant who had to reschedule. Regarding truthfulness, I assume all of the participants provided accurate responses to the interview questions. I was unable to conduct follow-up interviews, given the sensitivity of the topic and high demand of the participants' time.

The fourth and final assumption was that the participants would be most concerned with the time allotted for the interview and more than likely rush the process due to imperative responsibilities. This assumption was true for three of the participants. Two of the interviews were conducted over the phone because the participants had strict time constraints, as their assistants reminded me before speaking with them. The third participant was generous with his time, with the interview going 10 minutes over the allotted time. The fourth participant completed his interview questions electronically based on his time constraints. The one remaining participant appeared not to have long time constraints, allowing the in-person interview to last 1 hour and 45 minutes.

Contributions to Literature

I identified two contributions to the literature that emerged from the findings. The first relates to Experiential Learning. Despite the plethora of literature on experiential

learning, specific research on African American Fortune 500 CEOs is limited, if not absent or even obsolete. The participants in this study discussed their leadership positions/experiential learning that helped prepare them for their role. As mentioned in Chapter I, experiential learning is considered in two main senses. First, it is used to describe prior learning from the life experiences of the learner that is brought to a new situation. Second, and by far the most common use of the term, is to refer to the learning processes in which the experience of the learner is used as the prime source and stimulus for learning. As Dewey (1938) believed, all genuine education comes about through an experience.

The second contribution to the literature is the role of mentors and its varying definitions. According to the participants in this study, the term mentorship can be defined in both a traditional and a nontraditional sense. An extensive amount of research has discussed the important mentors in one's career; however, this study revealed that a "traditional" mentor was not really discussed by the majority of participants. One participant even warned the researcher about the overemphasis on mentors. Luther referred to mentorship as an investment, more along the lines of a business strategy.

The third contribution to the literature is the relatively new phenomenon of the 24/7 news cycle regarding the racial-social climate. The Fortune 500 CEOs, according to the participants in this study, typically remained silent about these issues. They described their strategy as dealing with the issue within the corporate environment. There are CEOs who neglect to voice a public opinion on these issues as well. It is fascinating to have specific quotes from individuals at the highest ranks of the corporate profession to indicate a deeper sense of how they think and act on these important issues.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences and leadership recommendations of current and former African American Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies in an effort to benefit aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, Human Resource professionals, and White executives who work with and aim to incorporate more African American executives. Five former/current CEOs took part in this study. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were examined:

1. What was the leadership trajectory to becoming a Fortune 500 CEO, and what recommendations would African American CEOs offer emerging African American CEOs based on the experiences of their trajectory?
2. How do/did African American CEOs leverage diversity in their organizations?
 - 2a. In what ways has the racial/social climate impacted how they navigated diversity as CEOs?

I was provided with the opportunity to interview five Fortune 500 African American CEOs. An exploration of the findings presented conclusions directly associated with the research questions in this study. The first conclusion relates to Research Question 1 which identified the attributes needed for an aspiring Fortune 500 CEO. The second conclusion relates to Research Questions 2 and 2a which discussed the meaning

of diversity and how the racial-social climate has impacted a CEO's navigation. The conclusions are considered below in greater detail.

Conclusion 1

An African American Fortune 500 CEO must have prior leadership experience with demonstrated results along with exceptional education and the innate will to succeed. This conclusion was derived from Finding #1: All participants (100%) in this study identified with and recommended that a Fortune 500 CEO's leadership trajectory include: leadership experience (experiential learning), educational degrees, institutions attended, mentorship, and perseverance. More specifically, all (100%) participants agreed with a CEO's prior leadership positions and 20% with performance. Second, education in relation to institutions and degrees obtained was an important component, 80% and 20%, respectively. Third, mentorship was broken down by traditional (40%), nontraditional (20%), and ownership of one's career (40%) in terms of how one defines a mentor. Lastly, perseverance was categorized by persistence (40%), goal setting (20%), and avoiding deterrence (20%). Perseverance appears to be a necessary component for an African American CEO, given that the corporate climate in terms of the C-Suite is roughly 2% Black. When the data are analyzed in terms of the Fortune 500 CEO as mentioned in Chapter V, the number is less than a full percentage, at 0.008%.

As discussed in Chapter II, I understand that experiential learning plays a significant role in an African American acquiring a Fortune 500 CEO position. It is experiential in the sense that the CEOs lacked a blueprint to follow, which forced them to rely on prior knowledge and experiences. Mentorship was mentioned by the CEOs, but

their definition of the term varied. For the majority, there was no reliance on mentorship. This reflected the study conducted by McCall et al. (1988), who discovered that the executives in their study obtained their positions solely based on timing. Mentoring and teacher relationships were non-existent.

Conclusion 2

The African American Fortune 500 CEOs incorporated diversity into their organizations based upon their definitions of the term. The African American Fortune 500 CEO's approach to the racial-social climate was by and large contingent on the type of company and how or if its stakeholders (i.e., shareholders, board members, customers, and employees) were affected.

This conclusion is attributed to Findings #2 and #2a: All participants (100%) believed they leveraged diversity in their organizations based on their definitions of the term and their methodical approach for incorporating it; moreover, the majority of the participants (60%) believed that the racial-social climate has impacted their corporate diversity navigation by their actions, whereas 40% believed the climate has no effect. I am aware that the term *diversity* can perhaps take on different contexts and meanings for different people. Given that there have only been 16 African American Fortune 500 CEOs and currently only four remain at the time this study was conducted, speaking out on racial-social issues may serve as a double-edged sword. This method of not actively speaking out could just be their individual approach or it may have to do with what Vernon Jordan (2001) posited in his autobiography, "A leader of an interracial organization must walk a fine line. If he or she is black, leaning too far in one direction

risks the charge of being called an Uncle Tom or Aunt Sally by blacks within the group and those who are outside observers. If one goes in the other direction, one risks being labeled insensitive or ungrateful by whites” (p. 229). Perhaps, at one end of the spectrum, this view still exists today, given the racial-social societal turmoil; at the other end of the spectrum, there are individuals who directly confront the issues. Kaiser CEO Bernard Tyson has been recognized as a CEO who often “speaks out.” Although Tyson is not a Fortune 500 CEO, his positionality and notoriety are believed to preclude him from general racial stereotypes. As discussed in Chapter II, he posited, “You would think my experience as a top executive would be different from a Black man who is working in a retail or food service job to support his family. Yet, he and I both understand the commonality of the Black male experience that remains consistent no matter what the economic status or job title” (Tyson, 2014, para. 2). Although, Tyson is the CEO of a non-profit organization, there were CEOs in this study who also headed non-profit organizations; needless to say, there was no difference in the responses from the non-profit vs. for profit executives in this study.

To add to Tyson’s comment, I was struck by how many of the five participants failed to mention the victims of the racial-social era, even though these names were specifically a part of an interview question (i.e., Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, Black Lives Matter, law enforcement and Black community tensions, presidential election, etc.). I had difficulty wrestling with the fact that the former CEOs did not appear to be outraged, particularly given that they essentially had nothing to lose in terms of answering to corporate boards or shareholders. They have garnered massive salaries, have healthy pensions, and live a lifestyle beyond what many consider the norm,

so where was the outrage? I then had to switch to another lens to view the complexities of their situation. Could it be that many of them lived during the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights movement? Is it that this climate is not surprising to them because they have become immune to being the “only one” in corporate spaces at the top? Perhaps the racially insensitive comments they have heard throughout the years are the norm and their viewpoint is to remain diplomatic and measured.

Perhaps I am naïve in this analysis because it may have simply been that these CEOs did not feel comfortable displaying their outrage to a stranger, especially on tape. They may have become accustomed to being maligned and held hostage to whatever comments they make publicly and/or privately in this era of WikiLeaks. One CEO repeatedly asked me who was going to have access to the interview recording and his answers to my questions. I had to assure him of the confidentiality and Institutional Review Board rules, even though he himself has a doctorate and understood university protocol with research. Another participant, a retired CEO, had his own recording device during the session and recorded the conversation in addition to my recording. Another CEO answered the majority of questions from a third-party perspective. These descriptions of my interview experiences are noted again to provide some context for the lives of these participants. Perhaps their outrage is released in private with family members, close friends, and other demographically similar executives.

Conceivably, their outrage is portrayed in their actions by implementing programs and giving back to causes. Hence, this may be the reason they have acquired the C-Suite: they are able to disguise their outrage and translate it into some kind of action. What does this mean for aspiring CEOs, however? How can one typify the strategies African

American CEOs use to navigate their corporate environment? Are they able to relate to aspiring CEOs or are they too far removed from the experience? These are the questions I considered when concluding my work on this study, but they remain questions that continue to call for further examination.

Recommendations

Leadership and the fascination with how a leader of an organization is defined will remain at the forefront of conversations among intellectuals, aspiring leaders, and think tanks for years to come. The rationale behind this study was the fact that only a limited amount of research has examined Fortune 500 African American CEOs and the process one needs to undergo to obtain an interview. This study aimed to provide some context for the thinking about and navigation of accessing those CEOs and what may be learned from them that will essentially be advantageous to aspiring leaders. Leadership and the ways one may display the effects of being an effective leader can be complex. This assumption may rely on thinking that leadership is only leadership in and of itself, and there need be no debate about one's ethnicity and/or gender when discussing it. This may very well be true and readers can draw their own conclusions based on the participants' narratives and responses. Thus, it was crucial for me to choose to leave certain quotes in their raw form so as not to delimit the participants' experiences. It is important to note that the recommendations in this study are not race specific. Based on the data collected for this study, I have developed several recommendations for aspiring African American CEOs, other minorities, Human Resource professionals, and White executives.

Recommendations for Aspiring African American CEOs and Other Minorities

The following are recommendations suggested by the Fortune 500 CEOs:

1. Stay persistent and do not say “it’s done, push forward” (Roman).
2. Set obtainable goals and follow them (Shelby).
3. Avoid taking jobs with fancy titles that are unrelated to one’s career goals (Frederick).
4. Find ways to spend time with colleagues in other areas so one can have a perspective on the lens they use to look at business (Frederick).
5. Do not substitute networking and connections with “persistently demonstrating skills that are widely perceived to be necessary to be a successful CEO” (Luther).
6. “Tend to your own garden” or, in other words, avoid distractions that can veer one away from one’s destination (Michael).

Additional recommendations to aspiring CEOs by the CEOs in this study can be found in Chapter IV.

Recommendations for Human Resource Professionals and White Executives

The following are the recommendations I considered and developed after conducting the interviews and analyzing the data:

1. Expand outreach-hiring services to employ more African Americans in the C-Suite (i.e., partnering with HBCUs, National Black Caucus, the National Bar Association, etc.).

2. Implement diversity training in corporations regarding racial diversity that outlines the history of the United States and diversity, particularly the beginning stages of that term (i.e., racial and gender).
3. Include data in company meetings that display the accuracy of positive information about African Americans and their tenure in companies along with educational attainment opportunities.
4. Create traditional/non-traditional ways to mentor aspiring African American C-Suite executives (i.e., Executive coaching, peer matching and virtual learning.) .
5. Engage in conversations with African American colleagues on how the racial-social climate impacts racial dynamics as a whole and particularly marginalized communities.

Expanding the search to be inclusive of African Americans in the corporate space will allow them the option to be mentored by people who look like them and have faced similar challenges in terms of the racial dynamics. This by no means indicates that non-African Americans cannot mentor African Americans; this simply suggests that the opportunities available should be increased. As Jordan (2001) stated, “Too often when blacks are considered for positions in white institutions, the tendency is to focus on the potential downside instead of evidence of possible good outcomes” (p. 310). Jordan added that even though today’s corporate world is more open to Blacks than ever before, equal footing is still disparate. “All one has to do is compare the range of schools attended by white associates and partners in major law firms to those attended by black

associates and partners, the vast majority of whom must come from the top four or five law schools in the country even to be considered for employment” (p. 310).

Recommendations for Further Research

This research has shed some light on African American Fortune 500 CEOs and their path to the C-Suite, along with views and strategies for dealing or not dealing with the racial-social climate in their prospective organizations. This research was not based on anecdotal assumptions or close confidants who spent time in the vicinity of these CEOs; all information was strictly “from the horse’s mouth,” so to speak. For further research, I recommend that additional studies be conducted to include more African American CEOs and focusing on one or two critical incidents that gave them the courage to move forward in their careers and describe how they felt mentally and spiritually in becoming the “first.” Gooden and O’Doherty’s (2015) racial autobiographies would serve as an excellent addition to how these Black CEOs discuss their racial formation and how they navigate within White spaces. According to Gooden and O’Doherty’s study on alerting aspiring leaders on racial awareness, often times African Americans are left feeling isolated in predominantly white spaces (2015). Although, their study focuses mainly within an educational context, their analysis is none the less crucial to adult racial development. Another recommendation is for researchers to study Fortune 100 and other executive companies and divide them up by retail and financial bases to see if there is a difference in the responses and experiences of African American corporate executives. Additionally, a study should specifically examine African American women CEOs and their experiences leading at predominantly White organizations (i.e., critical incidents). Additionally, a future researcher may want to thoroughly explore differences in responses

from non-profit and for profit CEOs in terms of critical incidents and leveraging diversity within their organizations. Lastly, a researcher may want to consider conducting a study specifically focused on African American CEOs (male and female) from a spectrum of companies and discuss their reactions to the racial-social climate and its impact on their immediate family members, despite their prestigious executive positions and financial rewards.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Letter

Date: December 1, 2015

Dear Dr./Mr./Mrs./Miss. _____:

You have been invited to participate in a study being conducted by André Harper at Teachers College-Columbia University to assess the ***Experiences and Leadership Recommendations of African American CEOs at Fortune 500 Companies.***

What you will do in this study: You will be asked to complete one (1) Demographic data sheet and answer questions during an in-person interview. Questions will include details about your demographics and the interview will outline your own personal views on what you have experienced as a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a Fortune 500 company-who happens to be African American.

Time required: The demographic data sheet and in-person interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no risks for participation in this study. This research study is designed to test leadership theories and self-perceptions of how your race has affected your effectiveness as a current or former Chancellor

Benefits: Your participation will help researchers learn more about “Experiences and Leadership Recommendations of African American CEOs at Fortune 500 Companies.” Additionally, at the end of the study, you will receive a full explanation of the results.

Confidentiality: All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All the information gathered from the study, will be kept in a secure location and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After successful completion of the dissertation defense, the information will be destroyed.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and this will not affect your current or future relations with Teachers College, Columbia University. You may withdraw by telling the researcher that you no longer wish to participate and the study will be stopped.

Researcher Contact: If you have any further questions after participating from this study, please contact the researcher at (408) 829-5100 or andreharper@gmail.com.

Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:

This study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lyle Yorks from Teachers College-Columbia University, Department of Organization & Leadership. He can be contacted at (212) xxx-xxxx or ly84@tc.columbia.edu or you can contact the Chair of Teachers College, Institutional Review Board at XXXX (212) xxx- xxxx.

Respectfully, André M. Harper

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What were the critical steps and experiences that enabled you to obtain the CEO position (career trajectory)?
 - Institutions attended
 - Importance of mentors
 - Previous experience
 - Critical incidents (i.e., racism, stereotypes)
2. How do you define leadership?
3. In your own words, what does diversity mean and how do you incorporate diversity in your organization?
4. What recommendations would you give an aspiring African American CEO given that 2% of corporate America is African American in terms of the c-suite (Recruiting Process)?
5. How important is it to be mentored as an aspiring CEO? Does ethnicity play a role in mentoring?
6. Chris Rock said African Americans in financially rewarding positions are always asked what they are doing to give back to their communities whereas white men are rarely asked this question-do you agree with this statement, why or why not?
 - How do you define community (Is it your responsibility to give back)?
 - What does it mean to give back?
7. How have the events of Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, church bombings, black lives matter and others impacted your daily work climate? Has this altered your leadership methodology?
8. Did you ever feel that others in your organization doubted you or did you feel as if you were being used to fulfill a diversity quota?
9. Is there anything I did not ask that you would have like for me to?

Appendix C

Demographic Data Questionnaire

1. What is your ethnicity?
 - A. Black/African American
 - B. Bi-Racial (African American and Caucasian)
 - C. Bi-Racial (African American and Hispanic)
 - D. Bi-Racial (African American and Asian)
 - E. Bi-Racial (African American and Indian)
 - F. Other_____
2. Were you a first generation College Student?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
3. Were you raised in a single parent household (Are you an only child yes or no)?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
4. What position did you hold before becoming the CEO?

5. How old were you when you were appointed CEO?

6. What is your political party affiliation?
 - A. Democratic Party
 - B. Republican Party
 - C. Libertarian Party
 - D. Green Party
 - E. Constitution Party
 - F. Decline to state
 - G. Other_____
7. If you are religious, what is your religion?

8. Relationship status?
 - A. Unmarried
 - B. Married
 - C. Divorced
 - D. Widowed
9. On average how many hours do you work per week?

10. What was your highest level of education when you became CEO?
 - A. Bachelors
 - B. Doctorate (PhD, EdD, PsyD, etc.)
 - C. Juris Doctorate
 - D. Masters
 - E. Other_____

Appendix D

Fortune 500 Board Member Interview

1. What is your definition of leadership?
2. What characteristics do you look for in a Fortune 500 CEO (i.e., Does their education/degrees' matter)?
3. What would you recommend to an aspiring CEO of a Fortune 500 company?
4. In your opinion, within the past 20 years has race been an issue with other board members when accepting an AA CEO's recommendations?
5. How would you define diversity?
6. How has the racial social era (i.e., Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Political climate, Police brutality, etc.) impacted the corporate world in terms of decision making and diversity programs?
7. What recommendations would you as a board member make to a CEO in this era particularly with race, (Attorney General Jeff Sessions suing Universities over affirmative action, Trump's comments on the confederate statues, DACA)?
8. How important is to have mentors when seeking an executive or board position?
9. Is there still a lack of a black presence on Fortune 500 corporate boards (if so, why)?
10. How important is it to give back to your community when you are a black person who has achieved status, wealth, education and/or prestige (Chris rock said blacks have pressure to give back but whites are not asked this at all)?

*Why do you think that there has still only been approximately 16 African American Fortune 500 CEOs given the advancements in education and other skills? How can this number be increased?

Appendix E

Fortune 500 Black CEOs

Craig Arnold	Eaton Corp (S&P 500)	2016-Present
Ursula Burns	Xerox Corp	2009-2016
Kenneth Chenault	American Express Co.	2001-Present
Marvin Ellison	JC Penny Co.	2015-Present
Roger Ferguson	TIAA-CREF	2008-Present
Kenneth Frazier	Merck & Co.	2011-Present
Alywin Lewis	Sears Holding Corp.	2005-2008
Rodney O'Neal	Delphi Automotive PLC	2009-2015
Stan O'Neal	Merrill Lynch	2002-2007
Clarence Otis	Darden Restaurants Inc.	2004-2014
Richard Parsons	Time Warner Inc.	2002-2007
Franklin Raines	Fannie Mae	1999-2004
Don Thompson	McDonald's Corp.	2012-2015
John Thompson	Symantec Corp.	1999-2009
Clifton Wharton Jr.	TIAA-CREF	1987-1993
Ronald Williams	Aetna Inc.	2006-2010

Appendix F

Types of Leadership

Trait Theory

Key Theorist	Concepts	Strengths	Critiques
Stogdill-1948 Mann-1959 Stogdill-1974 Lord, DeVader & Alliger-1986 Lirkpatrick & Locke-1991	<p>Early 1900s-Began with the Great Man theories-focused on individual characteristics that separated leaders from nonleaders</p> <p>Today-5 major Leadership Traits-intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability</p>	<p>Intuitive framing of the concept</p> <p>More than a century of research</p> <p>Sole focus-leader characteristics</p> <p>Deep understanding of personality</p> <p>Benchmark characteristics</p>	<p>Failure to delimit definitive traits</p> <p>Broad, rather subjective approach</p> <p>Failure to connect traits with outcomes</p> <p>Challenge to teach traits</p> <p>Lack explicit treatment of context</p>

Skills Approach

Key Theorists	Concepts	Strengths	Critiques
Katz (1955) Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman (2000) Yammarino (2000)	<p>Technical skills-proficiency in work or activity</p> <p>Human skills-people skills</p> <p>Conceptual Skills-work with ideas and concepts</p>	<p>Leader-centered model</p> <p>Focused on skill development</p> <p>Problem solving skills</p> <p>Social judgment</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Individual attributes</p> <p>Intuitively appealing</p>	<p>Extends beyond leadership domain</p> <p>Motivation</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Personality</p> <p>Conflict Resolution</p> <p>Weak in predictive value</p> <p>Includes traits</p>

Style Approach

Key Theorists	Concepts	Strengths	Critiques
Blake and Mouton (1960's) Stogdill (1948)	<p>Mirror for managers</p> <p>Focuses on behavior of leader</p>	<p>Broadens leaders in situations</p> <p>Offers credibility</p> <p>Includes tasks and relationship</p>	<p>No connection between performance outcomes</p> <p>Leadership only effective in high-high leadership</p> <p>Fails how effective it can be in every situation</p>

Types of Leadership Continued

Leadership	Origins	Key Thinkers	Strengths	Critiques	Application
Transformational	Downton (1973)-term coined. James MacGregor Burns's attempt to link the roles of leadership and followership (1978)	Burns (1978), Bass (1998), Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002) Howell & Avolio (1993) Burke-Litwin (1992)	1) Place strong emphasis on moral values 2) Widely researched using qualitative studies of CEO's	1) Lacks conceptual clarity 2) Implies there is a trait-like quality with transformational leadership	The MLQ Instrument measures leaders behavior and perceptions.
Authentic	Terry (1993) and George (2003) Two Practical Approaches	Luthans & Avolio (2003); Eagly (2005); Shamir & Eilam (2005); Avolio, Gardner & Walumbwa (2005), Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson (2008) and Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber (2009). Terry (1993) George (2003)	1) Fulfills needs of trustworthiness 2) Provides guidelines for inspiring leaders	1) Still in the formative stages of development 2) Not fully explained	Questionnaire with 16 questions to assess self awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency
Team	1920's and 30's. Human relations movement on collaborative efforts at work. Based on laboratory studies	Bion (1961); Tuckman (1965); Hackman (1986) and Dyer (1987)	1) Focuses on real life organizational work teams 2) Considers the changing role of leaders and followers in organizations	1) New Approach and not fully supported by research 2) Highly complex	Team excellence survey which provides 8 factors to diagnose team performance
Psychodynamic	Freud (1938) development of psychoanalysis MBTI origins	Berens et al., 2001; Gabriel, 2011; Kets de Vries, 2006; Kets de Vries and Balazs, 2011; Maccoby, 1981; Zaleznik, 1977	1) Analysis of the relationship between leader and follower 2) Universality	1) Used originally for serious mental difficulties 2) Based on MBTI-has reliability and validity problems	Myers-Briggs typology questionnaire to show profile preferences.

Types of Leadership Continued

Theories	Situational	Contingency	Path-Goal	Leader-Member Exchange
Origins	Task and Relationship Behaviors Leadership and development styles	Task Motivated or relationship Styles and situations	Employee motivation	Interaction between leaders and followers
Key Thinkers	Hersey and Blanchard (1969) Reddin's 3-D management style	Fiedler (1964, 1967; Fiedler and Garcia 1987), Fielder and Chemers, 1974)	Evans (1970), House (1971) House and Dessler (1974)	Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975), Graen (1976)
Strengths	Face validity Easily understood Applied Easily Leader flexibility	Supported by empirical research Leadership is situational Predictive	Useful theoretical framework Only theory that deals with motivation Reminds leaders of purpose	Based on performance Dyadic relationship between leader and follower Alerts leader biases
Critiques	Fewer studies conducted Ambiguous (employee) Competence and commitment not conceptualized	Doesn't address the disparity between failed leaders Difficult to apply in practice Leadership scale not valid	Complex to incorporate Partial support from empirical studies Too much responsibility on leader and less on subordinates	Feels anti-ethical No strategies offered to out-group Does not address contextual factors
Application	Evaluation of Employee competence and commitment	Instrument measures leadership style by describing difficult co-worker	Instrument represents the four types of behaviors (provides dominant leadership behavior)	Leaders and subordinates address respect, trust and obligation with the LMX 7 instrument

Appendix G

Matrices for Study

Author	Study Design	Samples	Methods	Key Findings	Implications
Ates	Exploratory Research Study Leadership Instruments LEAD-Self & PPP	39 AA college Presidents	Qualitative	50% of participants were selling leaders. No new data found-mirrored other leadership profiles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researches on other administrators were missing. • No in dept interviews were conducted from the Presidents (i.e., experiences, recommendations critical incidents).
Bacchus	Exploratory Study Survey Questionnaire (open & closed)	200 Black Male Executives VP or higher.	Qualitative and Quantitative	74% of the respondents felt that "the difficulty of finding influential mentors" was a major inhibitor. Another top inhibitor (74%) was that the "White male system looking to maintain statue quo" (also known as the good-old boy system) was a major obstacle to climbing the corporate ladder for Black executives. The third ranking inhibitor was "Racial Stereotyping," where 53% of the respondents chose this inhibitor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations to have a positive effect on other black males, minorities and women. • The study focused on other CEO's and not specifically from fortune 500's • There were a limited number of AA CEO's at 500 companies. • Barack Obama had not been elected at the time of the study • Actual AA CEO's at 500 companies were not accessible in this study
Hayes	Exploratory Research Study (Keegan's adult learning phases) In-person and telephone interviews	16 AA female executives	Qualitative Study	1) Black female exec's are not a monolith-they make meaning from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study focused on female executives only • Self-reflecting psychological approaches • What content do all AA CEO's at

				<p>their experiences</p> <p>2) Keegan's Self-authoring contributes to sustainability</p> <p>3) Participants were held to unusually stringent standards</p>	500 companies feel about their experiences
Mycroft	Study based on publicly available data. Financial indexes and	10 Fortune 500 businesses w/minority CEO's	Quantitative study Qualitative when determining results	<p>The presence of a minority CEO does not improve or diminish financial performance, on average. Both minority CEOs and non-minority CEOs shared similar levels of education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study contributes to the literature by linking minority leadership to the financial performance of their firms. The study demonstrated that race or ethnicity has no bearing on a company's financial performance. Is this the same for 500 companies? If so, why are the numbers still limited for AA CEO's? The research for this study was based on publicly available data and did not consist of interviews by the minority CEO's
Harper	Research study consisted of interviews survey instruments and leadership instrument.	11 AA participants Former & current community college chancellors in CA	Mixed Methods (Qual/Quan)	1) African-American chancellors had the same leadership	Recommendations were offered to aspiring AA chancellors and the study implied that research on chancellors in other states should be done to see if the
				<p>qualities along with the national average.</p> <p>2) AA obtains 40% of all educational doctorates.</p> <p>3) Participants all had similar education and years of experience.</p> <p>4) Participants agreed to discrimination in position.</p> <p>5) 64% of participants were "selling" leaders as their primary style and the secondary was participating and telling.</p>	results were similar. Research at HBCU's and others.
Thomas	Case Study-In-depth Interviews and archival data	20 Minority executives	Mixed Methods (Quantitative and Qualitative)	<p>Organizations should provide a range of career paths w/o being race specific to lead to the executive suite.</p> <p>Minorities in the study evaluated themselves</p>	<p>Pointed out the need to focus on AA executives exclusively given the gap in research and the years in between. Discussed the importance of mentorship, which begged the question if this was important CEOs at 500 corporations.</p>